



**CÁTIA SUSANA  
AMARAL DOS  
SANTOS**

**BOOK COVER TRENDS IN AMERICAN YOUNG  
ADULT LITERATURE**

**JULGANDO UM LIVRO PELA CAPA: TENDÊNCIAS  
NA LITERATURA JUVENIL AMERICANA**



Universidade de Aveiro Departamento de Línguas e Culturas  
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dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos  
requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos Editoriais,  
realizada sob a orientação científica do Dr. Kenneth David Callahan, Professor  
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## palavras-chave

capas de livros, literatura juvenil, história do design, história da edição, marketing de livros

## resumo

Desde crianças que ouvimos dizer que não devemos julgar um livro pela capa, mas a verdade é que muitos adolescentes fazem as suas escolhas de leitura com base nas capas dos livros (Jones, 2007; Yampbell, 2009). Neste contexto, considerei importante levar a cabo uma análise visual de capas de livros para adolescentes com o objetivo de encontrar tendências em termos de imagens, cores e tipografia. Para tal, analisei uma seleção de 50 livros da lista “Best Fiction For Young Adults” lançada em 2014 pela Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). Em termos de imagens, conclui que o corpo humano é o símbolo mais prevalente, em particular o corpo fragmentado focado na parte superior do corpo, isto é, a cara e os olhos. A inclusão de imagens corporais na capa de um livro é uma estratégia de marketing bastante efetiva, uma vez que os adolescentes tendem a criar uma relação pessoal com os protagonistas. Contudo, esta prática pode também transformar o corpo humano num objeto e fortalecer a ideia de que este pode ser manipulado, tanto pelo *designer* como pelo leitor. Em termos de cores, foi difícil estabelecer uma tendência, já que nas capas analisadas, a cor parece ser utilizada de forma aleatória. No entanto, foi possível concluir que o preto é sem dúvida a cor mais utilizada. O preto torna a capa mais elegante e sofisticada e torna o livro apelativo tanto para homens como para mulheres, uma vez que o preto é uma cor apreciada por ambos os sexos. Por último, em termos de tipografia, conclui que as fontes sem serifa são as mais utilizadas. Embora as fontes decorativas sejam geralmente as mais usadas em capas de livros, a simplicidade e aparente neutralidade de um tipo de letra sem serifa torna-se na melhor escolha para estas capas, uma vez que cria um balanço com a natureza mais emocional das suas imagens e cores.

**keywords**

book covers, young adult literature, design history, publishing history, book marketing

**abstract**

Although teenagers are taught to never judge a book by its cover, studies have shown that many teens do in fact make their reading decisions based on a book's cover art (Jones, 2007; Yampbell, 2009). In this context, I considered it important to conduct a visual analysis of young adult book covers to determine trends in terms of imagery, colours and typography. To do so, I analyzed a selection of 50 books drawn from the list put out in 2014 by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) naming the Best Fiction for Young Adults, and I reached some interesting conclusions. In terms of imagery, the human body is the most predominant motif, in particular the fragmented body with the focus on the upper part of body, such as the face and the eyes. Including body pictures in a book cover is an effective marketing strategy since teenagers tend to create a personal relationship with protagonists. However, this practice can also objectify the human body and strengthen the idea that it can be manipulated (as it is, both by the designer and the reader). In terms of colours, it was hard to establish a trend since colour seems to be used at random in the book covers analyzed. However, it was possible to determine that black is by far the most used colour. Black can make a cover appear sleek and sophisticated and also makes the book appealing to both male and female readers because black is liked by both sexes. Lastly, in terms of typography, I determined that sans serif typefaces are the most used. Although decorative typefaces are the ones generally used in book covers, the cleanness, simplicity and apparent neutrality of a sans serif type proves to be the best choice for these covers as it creates a balance with the emotionalizing nature of its images and colours.

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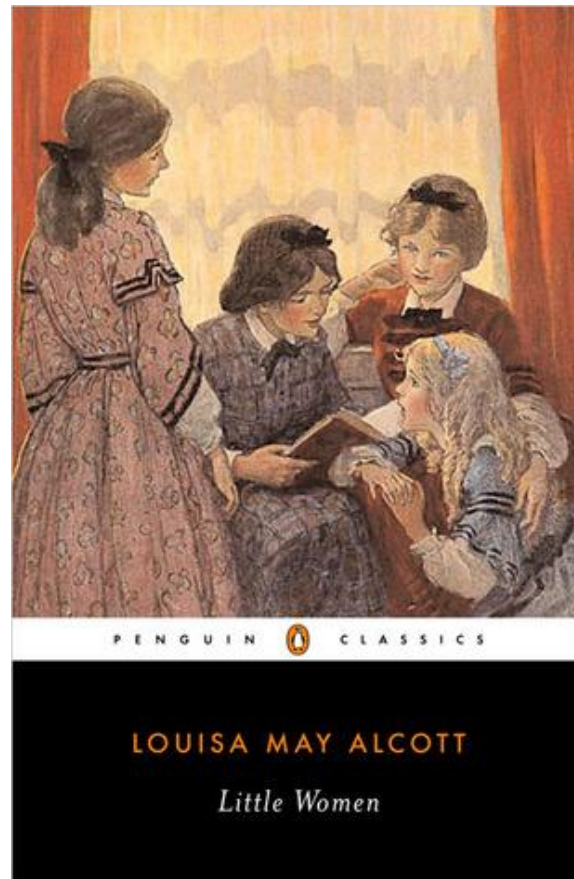


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# INTRODUCTION

## Young adult literature: definition and evolution



**Figure 1:** Penguin Classics 1989 paperback cover of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, first published in 1868.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the number of youths aged 10-19 amounted to over 40 million. Teenagers are accordingly a very important consumer segment in the country, with plenty of money of their own to spend, making them the target audience for a large number of industries, such as retailers, clothing companies, television shows, films, music acts and magazines (Kotler and Keller, 2012; Rosen, 2002). At a time when teenagers are exposed to a great variety of visual stimuli, it becomes particularly important for publishing companies to create book covers appealing enough to be able to compete for attention with all the other entertainment industries.

Matia Burnett writes that “a book cover is an invitation, a gateway to content, and a reader’s first experience of that book. In other words: covers matter” (2012). In fact, according to a 1998 survey conducted by *Publishers Weekly* and BookExpo America and an online questionnaire created in 2005 by Leigh Ann Jones, the majority of the teenagers polled agreed that the cover is what influences them the most in their choice to buy a book. In this context, it is relevant to determine common trends and patterns in terms of images, fonts and colours in covers of American teen books and how these elements are used to attract the young adult audience.

Prefacing this investigation, the introductory chapter of this dissertation will focus on the concept of young adult literature as a whole. I will start by defining what “young adult literature” is, drawing upon established expertise in the area in order to provide a clearer understanding of how the genre functions. I will also trace the history and evolution of young adult literature in the United States, a process that started in the late nineteenth century in the publishing environment in which most research has been done with respect to the topic (Nilsen and Donelson, 2009: 42).

In the second chapter, I will discuss the economic and cultural significance of book covers and how publishers and marketers use them to attract readers. Firstly, I will focus on the importance of book covers from a marketing point of view, using in particular Kotler and Keller’s *Marketing Management* (2012) and Kotler and Armstrong’s *Principles of Marketing* (2012). Afterwards, I will again trace the historical evolution of American book covers, but in terms of design, a history that coincides with the history of graphic design itself. This is relevant because, as Ned Drew and Paul Sternberger write,

Books and their covers are vital, physical manifestations of an evolving American intellectual tradition. In retrospect, the most intelligently designed covers of American

books recall particular moments in our cultural memory. The designs conjure up associations of our personal and collective encounters with the groundbreaking intellectual expressions of our times. They define what we were, what we hoped to be, and sometimes, what we have become (2005: 10).

The third and final chapter will be dedicated to the visual analysis of a selection of 50 book covers from the Young Adult Library Services Association's (YALSA) 2014 Best Fiction for Young Adults list, based on the colours, images and typefaces used. Although judging book covers on their own is a difficult task, since their design is part of a much wider marketing strategy, as argued by Philip Baines (cited in Sonzogni, 2011: 18), it is a location which provides evidence with respect to what the publishing industry believes are the images, symbols and motifs which appeal to teenagers nowadays. J. Anthony Blair highlights the persuasive and evocative power of all visual things and their ability to shape our attitudes, beliefs and actions (42). He calls these characteristics "visual arguments" and classifies them as "the species of visual persuasion in which the visual elements overlie, accentuate, render vivid and immediate, and otherwise elevate in forcefulness a reason or set of reasons offered for modifying a belief, an attitude or one's conduct" (Blair: 50). In this context, carrying out a visual analysis on young adult book covers might help in providing a clearer understanding of the teenage cultural practice of reading and its contexts (Moody, cited in O'Connell, 2010: 2).

## **I.1. Definition of young adult literature**

Like most other literary categorizations, young adult literature is not a very easy concept to define, albeit for specific reasons related to the definition of children's literature in general. However, many definitions have been proposed, all of them based on different principles. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a branch of the American Library Association (ALA) established in 1957, gives us the simplest definition for young adult literature: any work of fiction that has been written for readers between 12 and 18 years old. Ken Donelson and Alleen Nilsen offer a very similar explanation: young adult literature is any work that readers between the ages of 12 and 18 choose to read, either in their free time or as school work (2009: 3). However, some consider it necessary to divide this age group into two different categories. The first one ranges from 12 to 15 years old and it is made of readers that like to read about themselves and adolescence in general (Aronson cited in Owen, 2003: 12).

The second one is situated between 15 and 18 years old and it is made up of individuals who are anxious to leave their teenage years behind and, as such, prefer to read books that have a more mature and pragmatic view on life (Aronson cited in Owen, 2003: 12).

Amy Pattee claims that young adult literature is written by adults specifically for teenage readers, through the viewpoint of a young main character (cited in O’Connell, 2009: 5). In fact, according to Zohar Shavit, “adults not only write books for children, they also publish, evaluate, interpret and distribute them”, making them an additional addressee of children’s literature (1999: 83-84). John Noell Moore, author of *Interpreting Young Adult Literature*, defines the young adult novel as a coming-of-age story that revolves around characters between the ages of 12 and 20 years old who talk about issues typically associated with adolescence, such as first loves, puberty, family problems, social and school issues, just to name a few (cited in O’Connell, 2009: 5). Roberta Seelinger Trites writes that the main characters of the teen novel must know the social forces that make them what they are and learn to negotiate all the different levels of power that exist within the social institutions they belong to (2000: 3).

Katherine Proukou has a different approach to the subject. She claims that young adult literature is much more than literature for teenagers and literature *about* teenagers, but rather

it is a rite of passage. But it is much more. It is about life, its histories and potentialities, transformations and choice; it is about conflicts between the claim of the individual and the claims of culture (Freud); it is about life fantastic flux of being. It is about new beginnings and other directions; of young heroes who wind up threads and carry wisdom, of the child-one who sees, clearly that the emperor has no clothes. It is not only about rites of passage, but is also a rite of its own (2005: 62)

According to Proukou, the main characters of young adult books are not teenagers because their readers are also teenagers; they are teenagers because it is necessary to be that way (2005: 62). Children’s literature expert Zohar Shavit writes that childhood is “a lost paradise from which adults are driven away at an early stage and to which they can never return” (1999: 95). Therefore, choosing a young protagonist for their book will allow the author to awaken and empower the “child hero” within the mind of the reader by making them remember their youth and all its possibilities (Proukou, 2005: 62-63).

In *Young Adult Literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Pam Cole lists the characteristics that have defined young adult literature:

1. The protagonist is a teenager.
2. Events revolve around the protagonist and his/her struggle to resolve conflict.
3. The story is told from the viewpoint and in the voice of a young adult.
4. Literature is written by and for young adults.
5. Literature is marketed to the young adult audience.
6. Story doesn't have a "storybook" or "happily-ever-after" ending — a characteristic of children's books.
7. Parents are noticeably absent or at odds with young adults.
8. Themes address coming-of-age issues (e.g., maturity, sexuality, relationships, drugs).
9. Books contain under 300 pages, closer to 200. (2008: 49)

Nilsen and Donelson also compile several characteristics of young adult literature by examining the books on their Honor List.<sup>1</sup> First of all, teen books are written from the point of view of a young person, which is a transparent strategy to appeal to readers who supposedly identify with the narrator and therefore find it much easier to relate to what is being narrated (Nilsen and Donelson, 2009: 20). In addition, the plot of young adult books is fast-paced, their language is direct, aggressive and often edgy, and the number of characters and narrative events is limited and placed over a short period of time (Nilsen and Donelson, 2009: 29-30). However, while young adult literature is often spare and straightforward, avoiding complex syntax and long descriptions, at the same time it may also use "all of the literary elements in effective and innovative ways to convey exquisitely crafted, sophisticated, and challenging stories" (Wadham and Ostenson, 2013: 6), although quite what "all of the literary elements" might be is not exactly clear.

In the young adult literature realm, there is also a wide variety of genres and themes, including comedy, adventure, sports, the supernatural, mystery, fantasy, science-fiction and historical fiction, even poetry and drama (Nilsen and Donelson, 2009: 31). Teen books nowadays can also include stories about characters that come from several different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, allowing the reader to become acquainted with a range of difficult and challenging socio-cultural issues with their ultimate roots in colonial history (Nilsen and

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<sup>1</sup> Nilsen and Donelson's Honor List was created in 1967 and it includes books that they think are outstanding in some way, whether it is because of their originality, popularity or literary quality.

Donelson, 2009: 32). However, scholar Jean Webb complains that increasingly “detail and indigenous specialties [i.e., stories about little-known parts of the world]” are being removed from young adult books because they “are deemed by the multinational publishing giants not to travel between readers worldwide” (82).

Lastly, in order to be successful and long-lasting, a teen book must deal with emotions and experiences that are important to young adults and show emotional and intellectual growth, by having the main characters accomplish something that is not only believable, but also challenging enough to earn the respect of the reader (Nilsen and Donelson, 2009: 34-35). Due to the fact that many of these books explore complicated themes through the use of authentic and relatable characters, recognizable and meaningful settings and approachable modern syntax, young adult literature has often been promoted as a way to encourage struggling and reluctant readers to develop reading habits (Wadham and Ostenson, 2013: 6). Furthermore, Pam Cole writes that “young adult literature offers a window through which teens can examine their lives and the world in which they live”, by addressing modern-day issues that are relevant to them (2008: 61). This connection with current issues, says Cole, can indeed interest and hold “at-risk readers and nonreaders” because “young adult literature is not bound by archaic language; teens can more easily navigate the text and enjoy pop culture references, themes, and so on, resulting in more reading pleasure and ultimately enhancing reading comprehension” (2008: 61).

## **I.2. Historical evolution of the genre**

Because the focus of this dissertation is American young adult literature, I will only take into consideration the evolution of the genre in the United States.

Before the Second World War, the word “teenager” was very rarely used, as the idea that there was a different and individualized age group between childhood and adulthood was not widely accepted (Cart, 2011: 3). Until the late 1930s teenagers were still regarded as children and therefore didn’t have books specifically written for them (Cart, 2011: 8). However, as the new psychological theories of the first four decades of the twentieth century began to recognize a new stage in the life of human beings in modern societies, books written for this particular age group started to appear (Cart, 2011: 8).

Nilsen e Donelson claim that this was a process that developed gradually and might have started right after the American Civil War, with the nationwide recognition of Louisa

May Alcott and Horatio Alger, Jr. as the first young adult literature writers (2009: 42). Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) tells the story of four sisters and their passage from childhood to adulthood and all the issues that that journey entails, while going beyond the sentimentality that was characteristic of the time and presenting a world full of vitality and joy in which Alcott herself might have liked to have lived in (Nilsen e Donelson, 2009: 44). Alger's *Ragged Dick* (1868) is a series of "rags to riches" episodes that account the first steps of a young boy towards maturity, respectability and wealth (Nilsen e Donelson, 2009: 45).

In 1885, with the publication of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, came a turning point in young adult literature (Proukou, 2005: 63). Regarded as one of the "Great American Novels", Twain's book tells the story of a young boy named Huckleberry Finn who finds it hard to fit into the antebellum society of Southern United States. At one point in the novel, however, Huck is able to free himself from the social customs and morals that have always puzzled him and starts to take full responsibility for his actions and follow his own path (Proukou, 2005: 63). By the beginning of the twentieth century, reading was becoming more and more a daily activity in the lives of teenagers across America. Fiction was the preferred genre and the series of books from the Stratemeyer Syndicate,<sup>2</sup> which included the science-fiction adventures of Tom Swift and the mystery books about the Hardy Boys and by Nancy Drew, were the most popular among young readers (Nilsen e Donelson, 2009: 50-51).

In the 1930s, publishers started to take more notice of the emerging youth culture and began publishing what they considered to be a new kind of book (Cart, 2011: 9). One of the first books of this new era was Rose Wilder Lane's novel *Let the Hurricane Roar*, published in 1933 (Cart, 2011: 9; Nilsen e Donelson, 2009: 58). The novel tells the story of David and Molly, two recently-married young adults who live a hard life in the hostile environment of the West American plains (Cart, 2011: 9; Nilsen e Donelson, 2009: 58). Lane's book was an immediate success and its publisher started to promote it as the first of a new series books for teenagers (Cart, 2011: 9). However, it was only during World War II, when teenagers had come to be considered a distinct age group, that the field of young adult literature became properly established with the publication in 1942 of Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer* (Cart 2011: 11). The novel is narrated in the first person by Angie Morrow, a 17-year-old girl, and tells us a story of a summer love, while also including blatant drinking and smoking scenes,

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<sup>2</sup> The Stratemeyer Syndicate, created by author and editor Edward Stratemeyer in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was known for publishing series of books specifically aimed at teenagers and young readers. In fact, "Stratemeyer founded the most successful industry ever built around adolescent reading." (Nilsen and Donelson, 2009: 56).



something that was quite daring at the time (Cart, 2011: 11-12). Once again, the novel was a great success and publishers started to realize that a new publishing industry was emerging and it was made of a type of literature that was relevant to teenagers (Cart, 2011: 12).

In the prosperous post-war American society, publishers became aware that teenagers had money of their own to spend and began to produce books that spoke directly to the youth culture and tastes (Liang: 7). As a result, in the beginning of the 1950s, was published another young adult book that is still regarded as the seminal book of American adolescence, even if it was not initially written for teenagers: J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, published in 1951 (Graham, 2007: 18-19; Beckett, 2009: 23; Nielsen e Donelson, 2009: 63). Similarly to what happens in Daly's *Seventeenth Summer*, Salinger's novel is a first person account of a troubled 16-year-old named Holden Caulfield who, after being expelled from school for flunking every subject except English, decides to spend a few days in a hotel in New York City. There he meets the most different kinds of people and looks back on his past, specifically the death of his younger brother, Allie. Full of symbols such as Holden's red hunting hat and the displays of the Museum of Natural History, and a type of language that was characteristic of teenagers at the time, *The Catcher in the Rye* shows Holden facing several typical adolescent problems, which turned him into one of the greatest heroes of the Beat Generation<sup>3</sup> and of the youth culture that emerged during this decade, as important as James Dean, Jack Kerouac and Marlon Brando (Graham, 2009: 65). The latter part of this decade also witnessed another major development in the history of young adult literature in America: the creation in 1957 of the Young Adult Services Division (YASD), renamed the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) in 1992 (Richards, 2008:14). This branch of the American Library Association consists of a national group of over 5,200 librarians, library workers and advocates, who work to engage, serve and empower teens. According to YALSA's official website, their goals include the nurturing of teen literacy, the promotion of young adult literature, the fostering of digital literacy in teens and the support of young adult librarianship.

In the 1960s, a time of social and cultural upheaval, young adult literature started to become fully recognized as an independent literary category, as society started to recognize adolescence as a distinct age group with specific characteristics and needs (Wadham and

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<sup>3</sup> The Beat Generation was a group of writers founded by Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg in the 1940s at Columbia University. They came into prominence in the 1950s and rejected the materialism and consumerism of the post-war society they lived in, creating a type of literature that was bold, straight-forward, spontaneous and different from everything that had been done until then. With their non-conformist view of the world, the Beats paved the way for the hippie and other counterculture movements born in the 1960s. Other members of the Beat Generation included Neal Cassady, William S. Burroughs and Lucien Carr.

Ostenson, 2013: 5). With the publication in 1967 of *The Outsiders*, by S. E. Hinton, the concept of “young adult literature” was created for the first time and Hinton cemented her position as the first conscious creator of teen literature (Cart, 2011: 24-25; Wells, 2003: 1). The novel is again narrated in the first person by a teenager, 14-year-old Ponyboy Curtis, who tells the story of two rival gangs, the Socs and the Greasers, to which Ponyboy belongs to. Unlike what happens in Maureen Daly’s novel, *The Outsiders* presents a crueler and more realistic view of the American society, one in which teenagers do not have time to worry about first loves; rather, their only worry is whether they are going to survive the next attack of the rival gang or not (Cart, 2011: 25). By the late-1960s, young adult literature was in an inevitable period of transition which coincided with the postmodern era: stories of initiation and character development with extremely romantic resolutions became stories that questioned social institutions and the way they construct individuals, presenting a harsher and more faithful view on the adolescent reality of the time (Trites, 2000: 16; Cart, 2011: 29). By the end of the decade, young adult literature was finally a distinct literary genre (Trites, 2000: 9).

In the 1970s, teen literature started to approach more serious themes that were taboo up to that point, such as drugs, suicide, sexuality, prostitution, divorce, poverty, anorexia, just to name a few (Wells, 2003: 1; Campbell, 2008 cited in Cole, 2008: 66). The 1971 novel *Go Ask Alice*, for instance, presented “a life of sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll, and the toll it took”, speaking directly to teenagers at the time and setting a standard for what was called the “problem novel” (Aronson, 2002: 84). Patty Campbell writes that this problem, or problems, whatever their outcome might be, becomes the central motif of the novel, instead of a character or the author’s personal outlook (cited in Cole, 2008: 66). Although this type of novel only lasted a decade, and is considered by Campbell to be a mere digression (cited in Cole, 2008: 66), Aronson argues that it “created for teenagers a world of literature in their own voice about their own experiences. [It] defined a territory that, like teenagers’ lives, was not childish but did not center on adults” (2002: 84).

In 1974, came another turning point in young adult literature with the publication of *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier (Campbell, 2010: 12). Cormier’s novel initiated a type of controversy that would become frequently associated with the genre as, for the first time, a teen book went beyond the typical adolescent problems and approached what might be considered more widely-focused aspects of the human condition in general (Campbell, 2010: 12). In *A Species in Denial*, Jeremy Griffith describes the ‘human condition’ as “the agony of being unable to answer this question of why humans are the way they are” (2003: 25). In other

words, the human condition is “the agonizing, underlying, core, *real* question in all of the human life, [...] of are we humans fundamentally good or bad” (Griffith, 2011). And in fact, the early novels of the newly-created “young adult literature” category were “most often works of gritty realism, dealing with tough issues faced by complex characters that appealed to the teens facing the harsh realities of a time punctuated by rock and roll, war, and riots” (Wadham and Ostenson, 2013: 5).

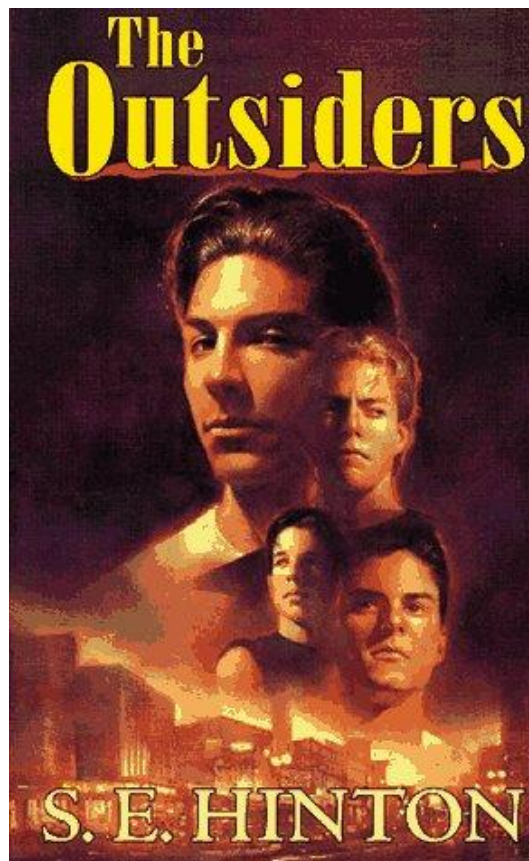
The 1980s saw the rise of “genre fiction”, particularly romance and horror, although these works were regarded as inferior to what had been written earlier (Wells, 2003: 1; Owen, 2003: 12). Publishers seemed to be more interested in quantity rather than quality (Owen, 2003: 12). However, due to several financial cuts in education and public libraries, these genres soon seemed to be close to extinction (Owen, 2003: 12). Marc Aronson writes that during the Reagan era the entire world of books for young readers changed: “it was like the middle novel in a fantasy trilogy: darkness descended and only the faithful still believed in YA” (2002: 84). Nevertheless, in the mid-1990s there was a resurgence and reinvention of young adult literature due mostly to the fact that authors and publishers were beginning to challenge the traditional format of the “problem novel”, both in terms of content and target audience (Owen, 2003: 12). With the popularization of the Internet and social networking media, teenagers were given increased possibilities of talking to each other without adult supervision, as several websites created by authors, publishers and readers started to appear and function as hubs where people could meet and talk about their interests, as a way to stimulate reading among teens (Owen, 2003: 12). The Harry Potter phenomenon was clearly also a deciding factor in making reading “cool” again (Wadham and Ostenson, 2013: 5). At this point, teenagers often had plenty of money of their own to spend and publishers finally started to realize that they were a bigger market than previously imagined (Wadham and Ostenson, 2013: 5). By the beginning of the new millennium, young adult literature had become “the fastest-growing market in the industry” (Wadham and Ostenson, 2013: 5).

Nowadays authors and publishers have more freedom to create, so the list of possible themes for a teen book has expanded enormously. It can include homosexual love, AIDS, rape, teen pregnancy, depression, violent acts (physical and psychological), suicide, incest, murder, political choices and environmental issues, not to mention vampires and fairies (Owen, 2003: 12). The writing styles can also vary: they can be surrealistic, poetic, realistic, or a personal and introspective look on the outside world (Owen, 2003: 12). Whatever form a young adult book takes, Aronson writes, “it will most likely hearken back to its two initial

forms: the direct expression of teenage experience and the invention of new worlds as wild, dangerous and profound as this one feels to the teenagers who are first learning to master it” (2002: 86).

## CHAPTER II

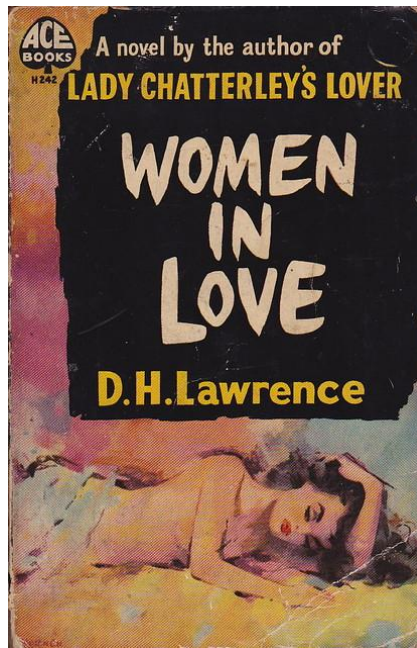
### Economic and cultural significance of book covers



**Figure 2:** First edition of S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (Viking Press, 1967)

## II.1. The book cover as a marketing tool

At a time when society is extensively manipulated by the mass media and an enormous amount of information is available in virtual form, it becomes particularly important to analyze the book as a “distinctive object”, one which reflects “a marriage of authors’ words and designers’ vision” (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 8). In *By Its Cover*, Ned Drew and Paul Sternberger call the book “a physical manifestation not just of the ideas of the author, but of the cultural ideals and aesthetics of a distinct historical moment” (2005: 8). Furthermore, its cover, working as a greeting card to the reader, must be “a graphic representation not simply of [the book’s] content, but of its point in history” (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 8). In Cat Yampbell’s “Judging a Book by its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature”, she writes that the cover is nothing less than “the foremost aspect of the book” (2005: 348) and, as such, works as bait, something to attract readers and persuade them to buy the book. In other words, and considering that nowadays bookstores are filled with hundreds of different books by different authors, a cover must be visually enticing enough so as to lure a reader into buying one book instead of another (Yampbell, 2005: 349). This is, unsurprisingly, the position of all researchers in the area. Leigh Ann Jones claims that “book covers play a prime role in the choices of readers” (2007: 45). In addition, she writes that “for publishers and retailers, book jackets are selling tools. They are designed to catch the reader’s eye, to cause the browser to select the book from the many available, and to purchase it over a competitor’s product” (Jones, 2007: 45). When readers look around a bookstore, the first thing they notice is the cover; consequently, its purpose is “to arouse in the prospective reader feelings of anticipation of the pleasures of reading the text” (Sonzogni, 2011: 15). Because the cover is the first thing we encounter of a book, the type of communication it embodies is one in which it forestalls “textual content by means of its own visual language” (Sonzogni, 2011: 15). That is, the particular type of text contained in a book, its narrative strategies, and even its precise matter are overwritten by the way in which design and editorial decisions have led to the choice of a particular type of cover. A classic example of how this can establish a radical disjunction can be seen in the covers of mass-market paperbacks of the 1950s and 1960s which attempted to attract readers to demanding literary works by suggesting they had a high erotic content or other sensationalist matter.

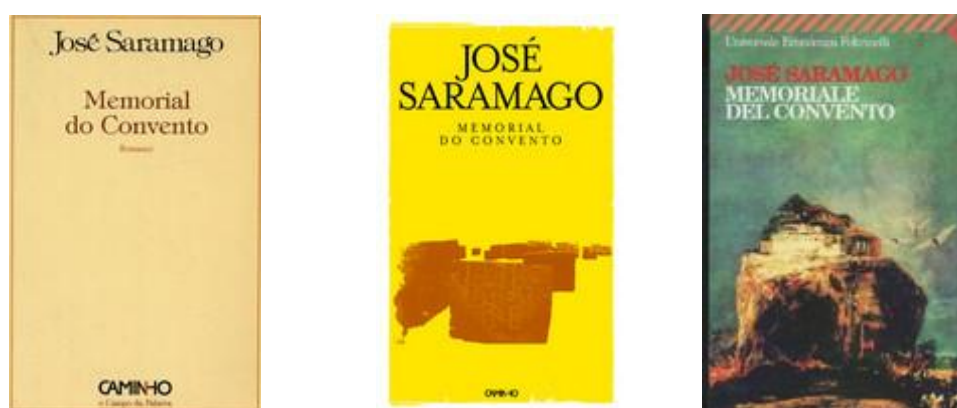


**Figure 3:** Ace Books 1959 edition of D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*.

Literary theorist Gérard Genette sees the book cover as a “threshold [...] an ‘undefined zone’ between the inside and the outside” (1997: 2). In other words, the cover offers “an airlock that helps the reader pass without too much respiratory difficulty from one world to the other” (Genette, 1997: 408). Basically, a book cover should be able to draw attention to the text, using mainly visual means and conveying the minimum of essential information, and do it effectively so that the reader picks up the book to eventually buy it (Sonzogni, 2011: 15). Mark Coker, founder of Smashwords, the world’s largest distributor of indie e-books, claims that a good cover can “help the reader instantly recognize that [a book] is for them” (quoted in Long, 2013).

The general assumption is that the publishing industry is product led and not fully aware of the needs of its markets and customers (Phillips: 19). However, as the example of *Women in Love* shows, publishers can also be accused of working backwards from their suppositions about readers and producing covers designed to attract readers who might not be attracted to a book if they saw a cover that was more in consonance with the book’s contents or formal character. Nowadays publishing companies have supposedly been developing their marketing departments even more keenly, taking into consideration the apparent needs of the markets into which they publish (Phillips: 19). To better understand how publishers assess these markets, it is necessary to clarify a few marketing concepts, namely segmentation, targeting and positioning, which apply to every product, including books.

Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller define segmentation as the process to divide markets into “well-defined slices” (2012: 214), which they call market segments, using four main segmentation variables: geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioural. Each one of these segments will consist of a group of customers with similar needs and wants, which will help the marketer to identify a “target market” and consequently create a “*market offering* that it *positions* in the minds of the target buyers as delivering some central benefit(s)” (Kotler and Keller, 2012: 10). Geographic segmentation involves dividing the market into nations, states, regions, counties, cities or neighborhoods, which will allow marketers to develop specific marketing programmes to meet the needs and wants of local customer groups, thus getting “as close and personally relevant to individual customers as possible” (Kotler and Keller, 2012: 214). This is relevant in the publishing industry because every market has different tastes in covers. For instance, a cover that is appealing for British readers might not be at all attractive for American readers (Phillips: 20). Graphic designer Adrian Shaughnessy argues that “books are culturally sensitive things: imagery that might have a subtle resonance in one country can appear meaningless gunk in another; the one-size-fits-all approach, common in global design, just doesn’t seem to wash when it comes to book design” (2004). It may also be easier for authors to exercise pressure in their own countries than in countries which produce translations of their works, or for countries to have traditions of cover design which are different from other countries; for whatever reason, the dissonance between the sober covers of novels by José Saramago in Portugal and the colourful covers produced in other countries is one example which stands out.



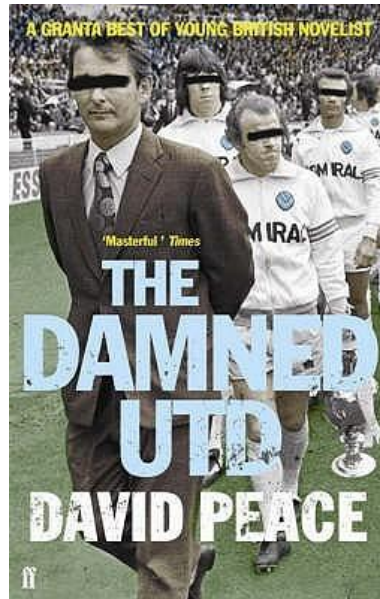
**Figure 4:** Portuguese original and current covers, and an Italian cover of José Saramago’s *Memorial do Convento*.



Using demographic segmentation, markets can be divided according to variables such as age, family size, family life cycle, gender, income, occupation, education, religion, race, generation, nationality and social class (Kotler and Keller, 2012: 216). These variables are very popular with marketers, not only because they are frequently associated with consumer needs and wants, but also because they are easy to measure (Kotler and Keller, 2012: 216). Again, this is significant within the book industry because reading increases with age, income and level of education. Bury determined that reading is most popular among people between the ages of 55 and 64, people who are still in education, and those who finished their education aged 19 or above (2005: 12, cited in Phillips: 20). In addition, a 2011 survey conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project showed that people with college educations and higher household incomes were more likely to read books than less educated and less affluent people (Rainie et al., 2012: 20). Studies have also shown that gender influences reading habits. The Pew Internet Project survey determined that women are more likely than men to be book readers and the Orange Prize for Fiction survey on reading habits concluded that 57% of women are readers of fiction, compared to only 36% of men (Rainie et al., 2012: 20; Hartley, 2003: 27, cited in Phillips: 20). In fact, the cover can indicate whether a book is aimed at men or women. The Orange Prize for Fiction study showed that “the front cover/title is taken to be a strong indicator of the sort of fiction a book is and whether or not it might be of interest, and — very importantly — whether the book is intended to be a male or female read” (Orange, 2000, quoted in Phillips: 23).



**Figure 5:** Headline Review’s 2013 paperback cover of Jill Mansell’s *Don’t Want To Miss A Thing*.



**Figure 6:** Faber & Faber’s 2007 paperback cover of David Peace’s *The Damned Utd*.

Psychographic segmentation is used to divide buyers according to their personality and psychological traits, lifestyle or values (Kotler and Keller, 2012: 225-226). These are important variables because they help marketers to understand the motivations of the consumers, which include ideals, achievement and self-expression (Kotler and Keller, 2012: 226). Once more, this type of segmentation applies to the publishing industry because “people buy books for what the purchase says about them — their taste, their cultivation, their trendiness” (Riggio, cited in Kotler and Armstrong, 2001: 183, cited in Phillips: 20). Additionally, designer Jennifer Richards argues that books are “accessory things” and to explain her point, she gives the example of *Sex and the City*:

*Sex and the City* has had a huge impact on the design of women’s fiction [...] The show made women look cool and sophisticated, and we should make books look appealing in the same way. Women should feel proud when they sit on the Tube reading a book because it has a great cover (Kean, 2005, quoted in Phillips: 21).

Lastly, behavioural segmentation allows marketers to divide buyers according to needs and benefits, decision roles and usage-related variables (Kotler and Keller, 2012: 227-228), all of which are important to the book industry. In the first place, we can divide the market taking into consideration the frequency with which readers buy books (Phillips: 21). For instance, the Pew Internet Project survey determined that the oldest readers are the most avid book

consumers (Rainie et al., 2012: 20). Covers can also suggest the occasion in which the book will be read and the benefits it offers to the readers, for example, “a light read for the beach, an air of mystery or a mood of passion” (Phillips: 23). According to Angus Phillips the cover of a novel can also suggest the plot of the book by evoking basic emotions, such as danger, passion or mystery (19). John Mullan is of the same opinion, arguing that novels “challenge and liberate the designer to suggest through the cover not merely what the contents of the book might be, but also what might be its special qualities, its singular space”, therefore providing “an especially rich field for book cover design” (2003).

After deciding what segments will be targeted, marketers must develop a “value proposition”, that is, “the full mix of benefits on which a brand is differentiated and positioned” (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012: 212). Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong define position as “the way the product is *defined by consumers* on important attributes — the place the product occupies in consumers’ minds relative to competing products” (2012: 207). In the book realm, the cover allows the book to be positioned not only in the mind of the consumer, but also in the mind of retailers who buy stock for their shops (Phillips: 23-24). To build a strong positioning strategy, marketers can focus on usage occasion (for instance, a summer read), the benefits offered (a thriller, a light read) or how the product relates to the competition (Phillips: 24). In larger stores, fiction books will be distributed according to genre, so the cover may work as a clue as to where the book should be displayed (Phillips: 24).

The colour and types of illustrations can also be strong indicators of a book’s genre. Tom Dyckhoff writes that “the bookshop is almost colour coded to make selection easier. Bubblegum cartoon covers for girly relationship novels. Cold-war thrillers, horror, sci-fi, all dressed in gothic black with melodramatic gold lettering” (2001). In addition, the feminine colours and distinctive types of illustration of chick-lit novels position them as reads for young women (Phillips: 24). Furthermore, saga fiction is positioned in the market through the cover illustration, which reflects the period and location of the story narrated in the book (Phillips: 24). However, the idea that colours and illustrations express or relate to the content of the book is not a new one. In the mid-nineteenth century, book decorators were already making use of certain symbols to indicate the genre of the book, for instance, “harps on songbooks, stag’s head on hunting stories, religious iconography on religious tracts, classical motifs for Greek or Roman history or architecture” (Thomson, 2010: 237). Colour codes were also used to categorize books. At the time, English publisher Joseph Cundall wrote that “in the British Museum, Books of Divinity are bound in blue, History in red, Poetry in yellow, and Biography

in olive coloured leather”, concluding that that was an excellent strategy for larger libraries (Cundall, 1848, quoted in Thomson, 2010: 237).

In conclusion, we can assume that the main role of a cover is to sell the book, first to the bookstore and then to the reader, and if a buyer does not like the cover, it most likely will not be taken down off the shelf (Williams). According to designer Ernst Reichl, readers “will select those books which have first enchanted [them] through a pleasing optical experience” (Reichl, 1936, cited in Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 33). Additionally, Alison Donalty, art director at HarperCollins Children’s Books, claims that the blame for a book’s poor sales performance is sometimes placed on its design by noting that “when a book does well, it’s the writing, but when a book bombs, it’s the jacket” (quoted in Britton, 2002). Perhaps one of the best examples of the significance of the cover in a book’s sales is what happened with the novels of Agatha Christie. In the 1980s, when faced with a decline in sales, HarperCollins, Christie’s publisher, asked for research to be carried out into her readers and their opinions on the covers of her books in order to find out specific reasons for this mysterious drop in sales (Phillips: 27; Birn, 2004: 54). Following months of questioning several target groups, it was concluded that the problem was indeed related to the covers: they were regarded as being misleading of the qualities of the author, by concentrating on the bloody and gory details of the crime, thus presenting the books as horror novels rather than mysteries (Phillips: 27). After HarperCollins found out that this was the problem, new covers were commissioned. Christie’s readers not only considered the new designs to be “intriguing”, “subtle” and “suitable for nice murders”, but also found that the pictures used related in some way to the title of the book and the whole design attempted to evoke a lot more quality in terms of imagery and style (Birn, 2004: 55). As a result, sales of Christie’s books increased by 40% in the first year of new covers (Phillips: 27).

Considering that “the cover designs of books are conceived as part of a much wider marketing strategy” (Hyland, 2005: 14, quoted in Phillips: 30) and that incorrect positioning has a direct impact on sales, designers, publishers and marketers must be up-to-date with wider social fashions in order to create a cover which the reader feels comfortable with and which clearly suggests where a book should be positioned in a shop. That is why market research is crucial for publishing companies: they must have good insight into how their markets function before deciding the style or theme for a cover, which will have to be not only visually appealing, but also communicate aspects of the content of the book which they feel will help to sell it.

## II.2. The book cover as a marketing device for teenage readers

In a 1998 survey led by *Publishers Weekly* and BookExpo America, which aimed to examine teens' reading habits, it was determined that 57% of the teenagers polled agreed that book covers are the element that most influences their choice when they buy a book (Yampbell, 2005: 354). In 2005, Leigh Ann Jones conducted an online questionnaire to determine the impact of book covers for middle school students and found out that 76% of the teens surveyed agreed that the cover was indeed the greatest influence in their selection of books (2007: 45).

In fact, confirming what we might expect, the more stylish, sophisticated and alluring a cover is, the more readers feel attracted to it and the more likely the book is to sell (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 33), although of course this is never guaranteed. As a result, and at a time when bookstores are investing more and more in marketing campaigns to attract and hold their teenage buyers, publishing companies are altering book covers as habits and tastes change in order to entice young readers to buy books (Yampbell, 2005: 356). Alex Lickerman writes that we are “predominantly visual creatures” and as such, “the wrappers in which things come not only powerfully affect what interests us but also how we react to the contents we find inside” (2012). Therefore, if a reader, whether a teenager or an adult, is not looking for a particular book, author or genre, the cover will be the decisive factor that will make them buy one book instead of another (Yampbell, 2005: 356; Phillips: 23). In fact, because covers are crucial in children's choice and purchase of a book, publishers do not release books without what they think will be “a telling and enticing front cover” (Graham, 2013: 28).

Citing Jennifer Schiff (2007) and Anastasia Goodstein (2007), Okan Ackay lists the following as the basic rules for marketing to teenagers: “to be authentic, honest, create a buzz about the company's product, offer cool products, keep your message simple, don't talk down to them, learn their language, offer something that they can use, engage with and solicit feedback from teenage customers” (2012: 10). In simpler terms, “give them what they want and go to where they are” (Maughan, 1999). It was only in the 1940s, when adolescence was recognized as an individualized age group, that marketers began to promote teenagers as a distinct group (Palladino, 1996: xv). As a result, teens became the target audience of a large number of advertisements, with the great majority suggesting “that they could be more popular, attractive, and likeable if they purchased the variety of new products on the market” (Heath, 1997: 1). During the 1950s and 1960s, instead of telling teenagers what to buy, advertisers began to take notice of and respond to the tastes of the emerging youth culture by

looking into “the activities of rock ‘n’ roll producers and the countless teen stars they tried to market to the general public” (Heath, 1997: 1). After the 1960s, teenagers became “a respectable and dependable ‘niche’ market — one that would wax and wane along with population trends like any other” (Palladino, 1996: xix).

It is widely accepted that young adult literature is a marketplace of the twentieth century. According to Roberta S. Trites, “teenagers’ increased economic resources and social autonomy in the robust economic years following World War II further increased their market power, making book publishing for older youths an even more attractive industry that it had ever before been” (2000: 9). In the publishing industry, the best way to market a book is through cover design because, as stated by Josh Bank of Alloy Entertainment, “the cover is a huge part of the way a book is marketed. It’s almost the entire advertising” (quoted in Rosen, 2010). At a time when teenagers are surrounded by a wide variety of visual stimuli, such as films, TV series, magazines and videogames, not to mention the panoply of sites on the internet, designers and publishing companies must keep up with the ever-changing teen tastes in order to create covers that are enticing enough to compete with all those other products. Alison Donalty from HarperCollins argues that “kids are being thrown complex images from every direction, so the challenge for a designer is to compete with those images” (quoted in Britton, 2002). As a result, publishers are starting to take new approaches to teen book design and formats (Maughan, 1999). In terms of design, a cover must be innovative but also mature, resembling a book for adults and not for teenagers, as well as be able to challenge the visual sophistication of a reader used to a striking visual culture (Yampbell, 2005: 358). Josh Bank asserts that a good teen book cover must have “a strong central image that communicates the feeling of the editorial, something that stands out on crowded shelves, and a title large enough to be read from outer space” (cited in Rosen, 2010). Most importantly, a teen book cover must be honest and authentic, however these qualities are defined. Cosette Kies argues that “if the illustration on the cover of a book implies something else rather than the actual content of the book, teenagers are disappointed” (1995: 89). In addition, Chris Richards claims that attempting to appear honest and authentic is always the basis of a good strategy designed to meet the needs of young adult readers (2008: 53).

When it comes to format, paperbacks seem to be the format of choice for teenage readers (Maughan, 1999). In the field of young adult literature, the paperback cover of S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967) set a precedent for the genre (Yampbell, 2005: 350). On this cover, we can see the faces of four young boys, supposedly representing the four main

protagonists of the story, in shades of dark oranges and browns. The book title and the author's name are written in big letters, the latter in upper case, and are placed at the top and bottom of the page, respectively. In addition, *The Outsiders* was published as a mass-market paperback and was of a smaller size and cheaper than the trade paperbacks<sup>4</sup> that were usually published for pre-teen readers (Yampbell, 2005: 350). Increasingly in the realm of publishing, size relates to the target audience, so the book's size set it apart from the trade texts and suggested that it was aimed at a more mature audience, "not a child, but a Young Adult" (Yampbell, 2005: 350). Even though standard paperback formats are those preferred for teens, publishers continue to experiment with sizes and formats. Publisher Nancy Pines from Pocket Books says: "we're trying to be fiscally responsible, but we have taken steps to jazz up the books, play with type sizes and design. Anything that gives the books more energy than a typical novel. It's an extra expense, but it's worth it" (quoted in Maughan, 1999).

In order to reach their target audience in a more effective way, it can be concluded that a teen book cover must not only be creative and refreshing, but also reflect the ever-changing trends of youth culture. Most importantly, "the book cover cannot be embarrassing to a teen" (Yampbell, 358). To achieve this, publishers must carry out periodical market research to develop insight into how teens function and into what is considered "in" and what is considered "out" in order to then create adequate book covers. Ami Hassel argues that "the covers in this category are driven by today's fashion world. Teens, particularly teen girls, are smart, savvy shoppers and they want the look of what they read to reflect current trends" (quoted in Yampbell, 2005: 357). In the words of former model turned teenage researcher Haley Morgan, "you can't reach them unless you understand them" (cited in Kiesling, 2002). Given that most people who make decisions at publishing houses have generally left their teenage years behind them some time ago, this only increases the need for constant market research.

### II.3. The evolution of book covers

While it is a fact that today book covers are a very powerful marketing tool, both for adults and teenagers, but that was not always the case. Before the nineteenth century, book covers

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<sup>4</sup> Trade paperbacks are paperback covers of higher quality and slightly more expensive (Lee, 2004: 29; Yampbell, 2005: 349). They also have a different size: see, for example: [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/16/books/review/PaperRow-t.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/16/books/review/PaperRow-t.html?_r=0)

were merely regarded as protective devices, simply “dust wrappers presenting publishers’ information about their other wares”, and cover illustrations were also scarce (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 20; Sonzogni, 2011: 16; Dyckhoff, 2001). In the 1820s, with the advancements of technology and machinery brought about by the Industrial Revolution, books began to be produced at a larger scale and bound in cloth-covered boards, which American publishers saw as a permanent cover and, if decorated, they could work as an important advertising tool (Thomson, 2010: 230). However, it was only in the 1890s that publishers became fully aware that book covers could indeed be excellent marketing tools, as they could be manipulated to arrest the attention of potential buyers (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 20).

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, as book covers started to work more and more as a promotional tool, many American graphic designers were investing their time and creativity into producing something that was both “individualistic creative expression” and of “social and economic utility” (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 20). As a result, book covers started to become more detailed and sophisticated in terms of fonts and imagery, in a style that was largely influenced by European Modernism, which consisted of a “total integration of word and image” (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 20; Meggs, 1992: 269). According to Philip Meggs, these modernist pictorial designs proved to be strong enough to respond to “communications problems during World War II and beyond”, thus becoming “one of the most enduring currents of twentieth-century graphic design” (1992: 269).

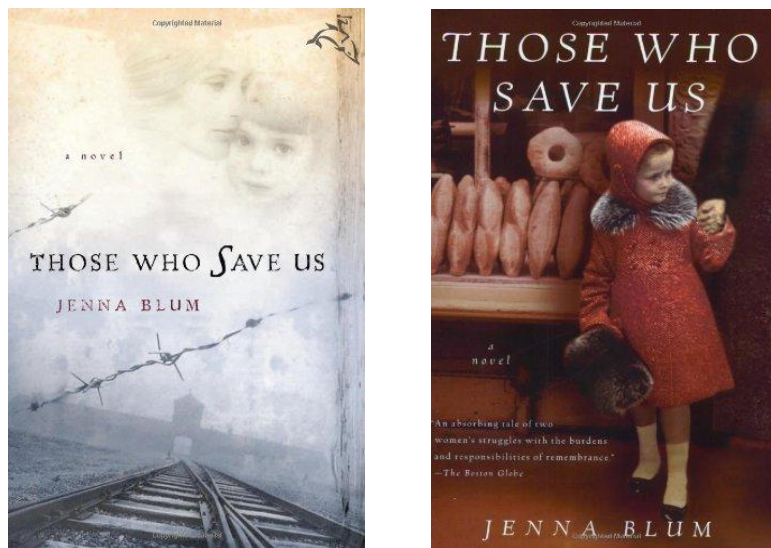
In the 1920s, a decade of mass consumption and communication induced by a booming economy, American consumers were presented with a “crash course” on visual imagery, thanks to cinemas, cheap newspapers, advertising and bright new packaged and branded products (Dyckhoff, 2001). Naturally, books were subject to branding as well and by creating a brand image publishers could make different book genres more recognizable to the consumer (Powers, 2001: 7). During the Roaring Twenties, colour was a trend in fashion and interior design, and as a result, “US publishers splashed colour with abandon, with gaudy dime editions at American stations capturing a regular, if, in terms of publishing houses, promiscuous reading” (Powers, 2001: 34; Dyckhoff, 2001).

During the Second World War, although there was a break in the growth of bookmaking, a revolution in the publishing industry was about to take place: the mass production of paperback covers (Lee, 2004: 28). This process made large printings possible, consequently reducing both production costs and retail prices (Lee, 2004: 28; Yampbell, 2005:



349; Ewen, 1976). Before mass production, industries created products for a “limited, largely middle- and upper-class market” (Ewen, 1976). With the high-speed production of paperbacks, the book became a more affordable item that could be sold not only in bookstores, but also in newsstands and drugstores, therefore becoming available to a larger number of buyers (Yampbell, 2005: 349; Flower, 1959: 16-17).

Although paperbacks can be traced back to the 1880s, it was only in 1935 that the first really professional venture into this market was made, with the creation in England of Penguin Books by Sir Allen Lane (Flower, 1959: 10; Yampbell, 2005: 349). In America, paperbacks started to gain form as a mass medium in 1938, with Robert de Graff’s Pocket Books, a project sponsored by Simon and Schuster and largely influenced by what Lane had done three years before (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 38; Flower, 1959: 14; Yampbell, 2005: 349). Marco Sonzogni writes that the paperback was truly a vital development within the publishing industry because not only did it employ many of today’s characteristics of book covers such as the use of colors, typefaces and images to distinguish genres, but it also revolutionized book pricing, format, portability and audiences for books (2011: 17). For instance, fiction novels aimed at young readers might be instantly released with paperback covers, since that market is not very comfortable with the hardback format (Phillips: 21; Kies, 1995: 89). In her article “The Point of Paperback”, Nichole Bernier also discusses the role of paperbacks, highlighting the possibility of providing books which have been re-designed and can be re-promoted. After talking with several editors, publishers, literary agents and writers, she concluded that “a paperback isn’t just a cheaper version of the book anymore. It’s a makeover. A facelift. And for some, a second shot” (Bernier, 2013). In fact, for some authors the re-launch of their books in paperback format can put them back in the spotlight in a way that the hardcover failed to do. For instance, author Jenna Blum, when talking about her first novel, *Those Who Save Us* (2004), says that “the paperback cover helped save the book from the remainder bins” (quoted in Bernier, 2013).



**Figure 7:** Houghton Mifflin's 2004 hardcover and 2005 paperback of Jenna Blum's *Those Who Save Us*.

One bookseller deemed the hardcover “gorgeous, haunting, and appropriate for a WWII novel, but not exactly reader-friendly” (quoted in Bernier, 2013). In fact, although grey evokes class and quietness and the neutral shades at the top of the page are often associated with purity, innocence, peace and hope, these colours also tend to be associated with the ideas of sadness, loneliness, depression and fear (Eiseman, 2006; Kaya and Epps, 2004). On the other hand, by using a photograph of a little girl in front of a European bakery and shades of reds, browns and oranges, colours often associated with warmth, nurture, optimism and happiness, the paperback cover of Blum's novel still references its Holocaust content “without frightening readers away” (Eiseman, 2004; Bernier, 2013).

In the 1950s, a time when the American book market was being challenged by other forms of entertainment, such as radio, motion pictures, television and magazines, publishers had to find new and innovative ways to respond to the “visual esthetics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Lee, 2004: 30). Tom Dyckhoff perceives the post-war years as “a kind of golden age in graphic design” (2001), as publishers gave designers unprecedented freedom to create and experiment. As a result, designers took on the bright and glossy colors and illustrations seen on the covers of magazines to create “more flamboyant and exuberant” book covers (McCleery: 3).

During the 1960s, while some designers were still very much inspired by the “spare, purified forms” and “potential for playful modification” that characterized modernism, an art form that appealed not only to authors and publishers, but also to designers, others were

looking for new approaches to book cover design (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 70-74). As a result, “historicist eclecticism” evolved. This was a technique which combined traditional illustration and historic typefaces with socio-cultural motifs drawn from 1960s America (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 74). Gérard Genette writes that the flexibility and versatility of the paratext,<sup>5</sup> as opposed to the immutability of the text, turn book covers into “an instrument of adaptation”, which means that they can reflect the “changes in its public in space and over time” (1997: 408). As a result, while modernism in design offered order and rationality, historicist eclecticism was a union of fonts, images and illustrations which provided “a more accessible, humanist acknowledgement of history” (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 74).

The 1970s were a time of restraint in the field of book cover design and the number of truly ground-breaking book covers dropped as a result of several shifts within the publishing industry, namely the change of heart of larger companies, which seemed more restricted to their pursuit of commercial supremacy (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 98). This meant that it was a lot harder for designers to articulate their personal style, as big publishing companies tended to release covers with familiar designs, that is, designs that followed the artistic trends of the two previous decades (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 98). 1970s book covers were also very type-dominated, with designers believing that typefaces were flexible enough to be a design element on their own (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 100). Towards the end of the 1970s, American book covers began to hint at some of the post-modernist elements that would characterize the following decade, namely the awareness and understanding of the past (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 112).

In fact, the 1980s witnessed a historical revival, originating a movement often called “retro”, which thrived on book jacket design (Meggs, 1992: 460-461). Design historian Philip Meggs characterizes the retro movement as being “based on an uninhibited eclectic interest in modernist European design from the first half of the century, a flagrant disregard for the ‘rules’ of proper typography, and a fascination with kinky and mannered typefaces designed and widely used during the 1920s and 1930s, then banished after World War II” (1992: 460). Also, at this point, designers began to realize that the recent advances in computer technology could provide them with new tools to explore text and image, and style became “pluralistic, eclectic and deeply enamored with texture, pattern, surface, color and a playful geometry” (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 117; Meggs, 1992: 456). As a result, book covers turned into a

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<sup>5</sup> Genette describes the paratext as “verbal or other productions, such as an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations”, which accompany, adorn and reinforce a text (1997: 1).

“pastiche of disconnected images, type and patterns” with bright and contrasting colors and forms, which created a more intriguing look (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 112-125). In the field of young adult literature, 1970s and 1980s book covers were not as elaborate as other kinds of books. During these two decades, it was general belief that personal identification with the characters in a book was crucial for teenagers (Kies, 1995: 90). As a result, the covers of teen novels displayed “pensive looking teens”, drawn in watercolours in either a scene from the book or during an important moment in the life of the main character (Yampbell, 2005: 356-357).

The 1990s were a period of transition between historicist formalism and a more suggestive and fluid design (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 140). By this point, technology was advanced and most publishing companies began to introduce computers into their design departments, which meant that designers had a lot more opportunities to easily manipulate text and image (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 146; Britton, 2002). David Saylor of Scholastic confirms that the computerization of design departments gave designers much more freedom to experiment with such elements as placement, size and typefaces (quoted in Britton, 2002). However, not every designer gave in to the enchantment of the new image manipulation software, instead choosing to work with real objects and textures, giving their covers a raw and supposedly more truthful image (Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 146).

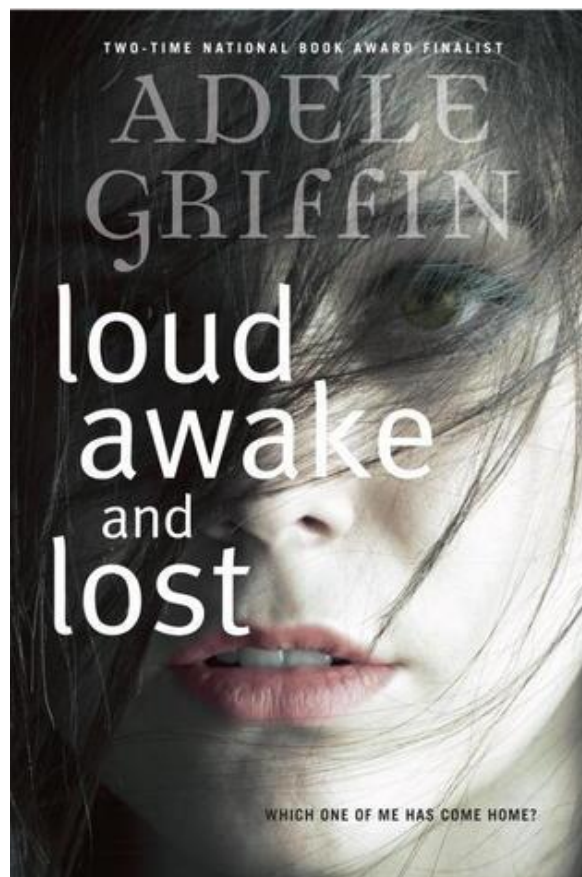
In young adult literature, the early 1990s witnessed a gradual replacement of watercolours for photographs of “brooding, contemplative teenagers”, a process that had already started in the later years of the previous decade (Yampbell, 2005: 357). By the end of the millennium, with the development of new editing software, publishing companies felt the need to create more energetic and stimulating covers, in order to give the book a more contemporary image to look more like what Generation Y teenagers were used to seeing (Yampbell, 2005: 357).

By the early twenty-first century, technology was offering designers a vast set of options and electronic techniques which allowed them to enter “a period of pluralism and diversity in design” (Meggs and Purvis, 2006: 488-489). Consequently, cover design became more elaborate and refined, as “color, texture, images, and typography could be stretched, bent, made transparent, layered and combined in unprecedented ways” (Meggs and Purvis, 2006: 490). These new cover design options also translated into teen book covers, which became less realistic and tended to display images rather than people, aiming to reach a multicultural audience by not apparently pre-defining it through an image of a particular ethnic

or racialized group (Yampbell, 2005: 357). With the help of computers and image editing software, designers were able to create more imaginative and innovative book covers and the new printing techniques allowed the use of holograms, foil and matte lamination as new gimmicks to attract teenagers (Yampbell, 2005: 357). However, Tom Dyckhoff importantly claims that because bookmaking is now such a highly mechanized process, the opportunity for a designer's own interpretation and creativity is limited, writing that "computer-driven graphic design has made book cover design a quick and often thoughtless process, at best a matter of shrewd but bleeding obvious picture editing, rather than design" (2001).

## CHAPTER III

### Visual analysis of young adult book covers



**Figure 8:** Penguin's cover of Adele Griffin's *Loud Awake and Lost*.

As mentioned previously, a few studies, such as the 1998 *Publishers Weekly* and BookExpo America survey and the 2005 online questionnaire conducted by Leigh Ann Jones, have determined that the cover is the element that most influences teenagers in their selection of a book. In this context, therefore, it is relevant to conduct a visual analysis of teen book covers to determine trends and common patterns in terms of colour schemes and combinations, types of images and illustrations and types of fonts used.

Cecile L. K. Martin writes that “design is about communication, the manipulating of visual tools to form a narrative” (1998), and in fact, a book cover is made up of several forms of paratext, such as images, colors and typography that work together to attract readers and represent the content written inside, in what J. Anthony Blair calls “visual persuasion” (43). According to Blair, visual communication can be far more effective than verbal communication. Through a verbal argument, “the arguer can fail to be effectively evocative, the audience can refuse to cooperate in the imaginative exercise, and the audience can, even if trying, fail in its imaginative task” (Blair: 53). However, with a visual argument, the arguer’s chances to fail are reduced to one:

The creator of the visual expression of the argument can fail to give adequate or appropriate visual expression to the feelings or attitudes to be conveyed, and in that case, the advantages of the visual expression of the argument are lost. However, should the visual expression succeed [...] then the audience cannot help but become involved, and in just the way the arguer intends. Hence the arguer does not have to rely on either the cooperation of the audience or its powers of sympathetic imagination. In this respect, then, visual argument is likely to be more efficient than its verbal counterpart (Blair: 53-54).

Furthermore, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen argue that “visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction” (1996: 2), a notion which is in consonance with Blair’s idea that visual imagery, because of its immediacy, has the power “to evoke involuntary reactions” (54). In fact, a book cover can suggest various feelings to the reader: the genre of the book, its plot or even the occasion in which it will be read (Phillips: 19-24).

Diana S. Hope writes that “image-based advertising is the omnipresent signature of corporate commodity culture” (155). As a result, the imagery displayed on book covers works as “the primary marker of consumer identity”, as the pictures help establish a relationship

between the consumers and the environment they live in (Hope: 155). Molly Bang corroborates this idea, noting that “we see pictures as extensions of our real world” (1991: 54). In young adult literature, these elements can create the illusion of an ideal world for the teenage reader (O’Connell, 2010: 24). Kress and van Leeuwen explain that “what is expressed in language through the choice between different word classes and clause structures, may, in visual communication, be expressed through the choice between different uses of colour or different compositional structures” (1996: 2). In fact, since colour is the element “that elicits greatest emotional response” (Martin, 1998), the colours used on a book cover can influence the reader’s mood and their overall perception of the book. Colour expert Leatrice Eiseman argues that different colours project different psychological messages and meanings depending on their shade, application and context of usage (2006: 4). For instance, red is the color of sex and seduction, transmitting excitement, power and strength; pink is associated with softness and innocence; yellow and orange are the colours of energy and life; blue represents constancy, quality and achievement; green evokes calmness and harmony; purple is the colour of passion and magic; brown is associated with earth and the idea of warmness; black is sleek and sophisticated; and white represents cleanness and purity (Eiseman, 2006; Eiseman, 1998: 4-5). In *Color: Messages and Meanings*, Eiseman also discusses how certain colour combinations can trigger in the viewer specific responses (2006: 80), which will again influence the reader’s perception of a book.

In addition to images and colours, typography is also a clearly important element in any book cover. In their article “Typography as Semiotic Resource”, Frank Serafini and Susan Clausen argue that “the typography of written language not only serves as a conduit of verbal narrative, it serves as a visual element and semiotic resource with its own meaning potentials” (2012). According to Tova Rabinowitz, “the first step in communicating effectively using type is to determine exactly what you want to communicate” and to do so, designers must take into consideration “the specific needs and tastes of their audiences, as well as the content, meaning and mood of the design’s message” (2006: 339). In fact, nowadays book designers seem to be more aware of the “meaning potentials and effects communicated through their typographical selections and typeface designs” (Serafini and Clausen, 2012).

In the following sub-chapter, I will accordingly analyze 50 teen book covers which were drawn from YALSA’s 2014 Best Fiction for Young Adults list. Every year, after ALA’s Midwinter Meeting, the Young Adult Library Services Association releases a list of the best books for teenage readers (the authors of which need not be American). This year’s list



includes a total of 98 books selected from 175 official nominations and which are recommended for readers between the ages of 12 and 18. YALSA considers these books to be not only of good literary quality, but also appealing to young readers. In addition, the list includes a wide variety of genres and styles, such as contemporary fiction, that is, stories set in the same time they were written, fantasy horror, science and even novels in verse. According to BFYA Chair Sarah Townsend, “this year’s list has something for everyone. From a middle-grade book about a kid auditioning on Broadway to a young-adult novel about a town infected with murderous rage, the list reflects the wide interests of teen readers. The committee’s dedication to reading broadly and discussing the merits of each of our 175 nominated titles has produced a list of which we are proud.”<sup>6</sup> The following table comprises the title, as well as the author’s name and publishing company, of the books analyzed in this dissertation.

Book	Author	Publishing Company
<i>A Moment Comes</i>	Jennifer Bradbury	Simon & Schuster
<i>A Trick of the Light</i>	Lois Metzger	HarperCollins
<i>All the Truth That’s in Me</i>	Julie Berry	Penguin
<i>Black Helicopters</i>	Blythe Woolston	Candlewick
<i>Blythewood</i>	Carol Goodman	Penguin
<i>Born of Illusion</i>	Teri Brown	HarperCollins
<i>Chasing Shadows</i>	Swati Avasthi	Random House
<i>Coaltown Jesus</i>	Ron Koertge	Candlewick
<i>Counting by 7s</i>	Holly Goldberg Sloan	Penguin
<i>Crash and Burn</i>	Michael Hassan	HarperCollins
<i>Crown of Midnight</i>	Sarah J. Maas	Bloomsbury USA
<i>Dark Triumph</i>	Robin LeFevers	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
<i>Days of Blood and Starlight</i>	Laini Taylor	Little, Brown
<i>Dear Life, You Suck</i>	Scott Blagden	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
<i>Etiquette &amp; Espionage</i>	Gail Carriger	Little, Brown
<i>Game</i>	Barry Lyga	Little, Brown
<i>Golden Boy</i>	Tara Sullivan	Penguin
<i>If You Could Be Mine</i>	Sara Farizan	Algonquin
<i>If You Find Me</i>	Emily Murdoch	Macmillan
<i>In The Shadow of Blackbirds</i>	Cat Winters	Abrams
<i>Just One Day</i>	Gayle Forman	Penguin
<i>Ketchup Clouds</i>	Annabel Pitcher	Little, Brown

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/2014-best-fiction-young-adults>

<i>Kindness For Weakness</i>	Shawn Goodman	Random House
<i>Living With Jackie Chan</i>	Jo Knowles	Candlewick
<i>Loud Awake and Lost</i>	Adele Griffin	Random House
<i>Love and Other Perishable Items</i>	Laura Buzo	Random House
<i>Midwinterblood</i>	Marcus Sedgwick	Macmillan
<i>Navigating Early</i>	Clare Vanderpool	Random House
<i>Perfect Ruin</i>	Lauren DeStefano	Simon & Schuster
<i>Pieces</i>	Chris Lynch	Simon & Schuster
<i>Pivot Point</i>	Kasie West	HarperCollins
<i>Prisoner B-3087</i>	Alan Gratz	Scholastic
<i>Prodigy</i>	Marie Lu	Penguin
<i>Quintana of Charyn</i>	Melina Marchetta	Candlewick
<i>Raven Flight</i>	Juliet Marillier	Random House
<i>Reality Boy</i>	A. S. King	Little, Brown
<i>Skinny</i>	Donna Cooner	Scholastic
<i>Teeth</i>	Hannah Moskowitz	Simon & Schuster
<i>The Coldest Girl in Coldtown</i>	Holly Black	Little, Brown
<i>The End Games</i>	T. Michael Martin	HarperCollins
<i>The Language Inside</i>	Holly Thompson	Random House
<i>The Lightning Dreamer</i>	Margarita Engle	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
<i>The Lucy Variations</i>	Sara Zarr	Little, Brown
<i>The Madman's Daughter</i>	Megan Shepherd	HarperCollins
<i>The Midnight Dress</i>	Karen Foxlee	Random House
<i>The Tragedy Paper</i>	Elizabeth Laban	Random House
<i>Two Boys Kissing</i>	David Levithan	Random House
<i>When We Wake</i>	Karen Healey	Little, Brown
<i>Wise Young Fool</i>	Sean Beaudoin	Little, Brown
<i>Yellowcake</i>	Margo Lanagan	Random House

**Table 1:** List of the 50 books analyzed in this dissertation, along with their author and publishing company.

(Source: <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/2014-best-fiction-young-adults>)

### III.1. Preliminary analysis and findings

For my visual analysis of the 50 young adult book covers listed in the table above, I took into consideration the types of images, colours and kinds of typography used, aiming to determine trends or common patterns.

### III.1.1. Images

In terms of imagery, the most prevalent motif is the human body, with 41 out of the 50 covers featuring the human body in some form or the other. Out of the 41 covers that feature the human body, 30 are of a fragmented body: 16 focus on the upper part of the body, such as the face and the eyes; 12 focus on the middle part of the body, that is, the torso, arms and hands; and 2 focus on the lower part of the body, such as legs and feet. A full body image appears in 11 covers. The remaining 9 book covers feature a single graphic element, such as a jar with a heart inside, a bird symbol, drawings of fish and a couple of matches, just to name a few. The table below contains the type of image as well as the number of book covers in which these images appear.

Type of image	No. of book covers
Human body	41
▪ Fragmented	30
□ Upper part (face and eyes)	16
□ Middle part (torso, arms and hands)	12
□ Lower part (legs and feet)	2
▪ Full body	11
Single graphic element	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>

**Table 2:** Types of images featured in the 50 book covers analyzed, as well as the number of covers in which they appear.

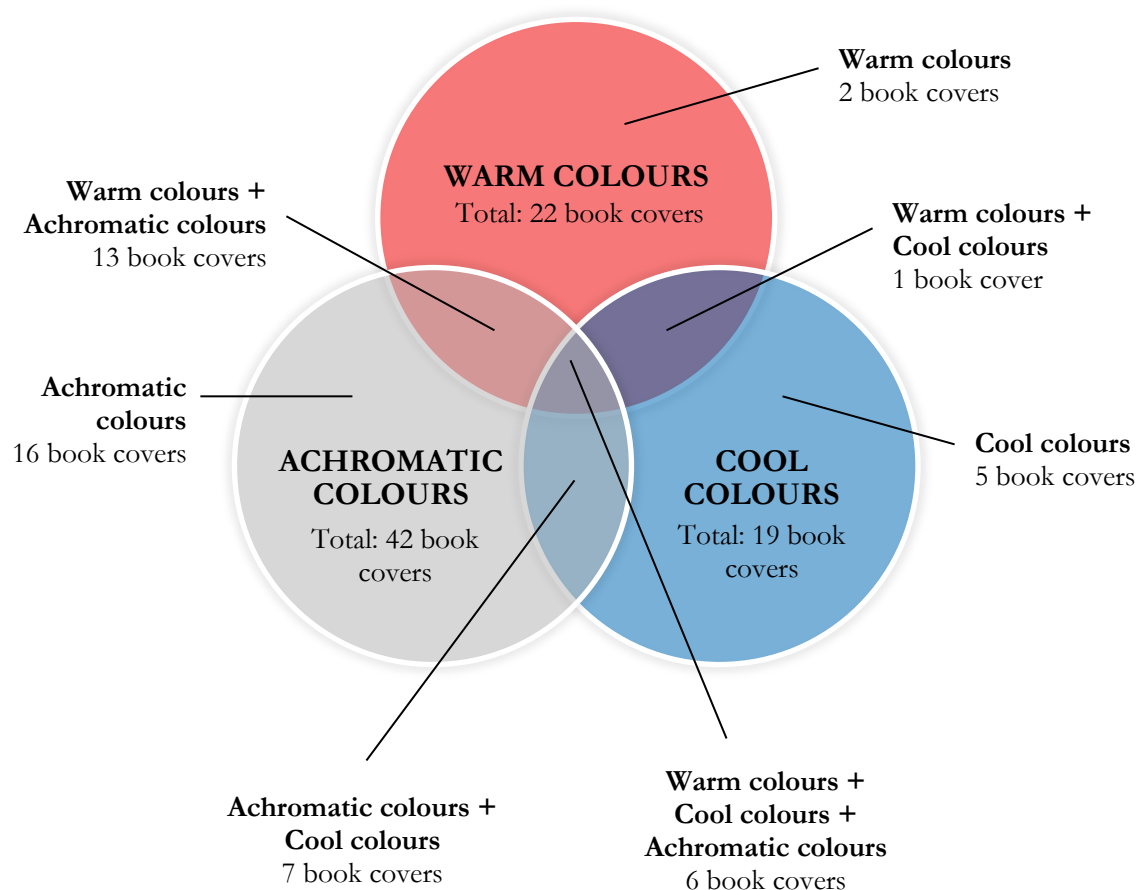
Including pictures of the human body in a book cover is an effective marketing strategy, as teenagers tend to project themselves into those images and establish a personal relationship with that character. However, this can also be damaging for teenagers, as it mediates an objectification of the body and promotes body ideals that teens might become obsessed with.

It is also interesting to notice that in the 33 covers where it is possible to distinguish the gender of the person featured, 23 are girls, 9 are boys (2 of them are featured in the same cover, depicting a homosexual couple), and there is one cover that features a heterosexual couple. Since girls buy more books than boys, it is acceptable that book covers should feature a picture of a girl. The depiction of a homosexual couple in one of these covers indicates that

writers and designers now have more freedom to work with themes that were taboo a few decades ago.

### III.1.2. Colours

For this particular topic, it is hard to establish an exact quantitative pattern, as there are numerous colours and shades that seem to be used at random. However, it is possible to examine these book covers in terms of warm, cool and achromatic colours, as shown in the Venn diagram<sup>7</sup> presented below.



**Table 3:** Venn diagram detailing the number of book covers in which warm, cool and achromatic colours appear, both alone and in combination with each other.

<sup>7</sup> The Venn diagram was introduced by mathematician John Venn in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is used today in several fields of knowledge to represent all possible logical relationships between a finite collection of sets.

Achromatic colours are by far the most predominant, appearing in 42 covers: 16 of these covers feature achromatic colours alone, in 13 they are combined with warm colours, mainly red, and in 7 they appeared combined with cool colours, especially blue. Warm colours are the second most used, although these appear mostly as accents. Two covers feature warm colours alone and in one cover they are combined with cool colours. Cool colours appear in a total of 19 covers, but only 5 feature cool colours alone. Lastly, 6 covers combine warm, cool and achromatic colours.

In terms of individual colours, black is the most used overall, appearing especially as background colour and in people's clothes and hair. Red also appears quite often, although it is mostly in small details, such as people's clothes and lipstick shade. Blue also stands out as one of the most used colours, as well as white.

### III.1.3. Typography

Typefaces can be analyzed taking into consideration several aspects, such as weight, slope, curvature or color. However, in my analysis, I only took into consideration the groups type is generally categorized into: old style, modern, slab serif, sans serif, script and decorative. The table below shows my findings in terms of typography in the 50 book covers analyzed.

Type category	No. of book covers
Old style	0
Modern	7
Slab serif	2
Sans serif	22
Script	4
Decorative	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>

**Table 4:** Number of book covers that feature old style, modern, slab serif, sans serif, script and decorative typography.

With 22 covers, sans serif is the most predominant typographic style, followed by decorative, with a total of 15 covers. In addition, modern type appears in 7 covers, script is

featured in 4, and slab serif is used in 2 covers. Lastly, none of the book covers analyzed feature old style typography.

## III.2. Discussion

### III.2.1. The body on young adult book covers

The most prevalent trend in the 50 young adult book covers analyzed is the representation of the human body, both in full and fragmented form. In their introduction to *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, Marguerite Helmers and Charles A. Hill argue that “images have played an important role in developing consciousness and the relationship of the self to its surroundings. We learn who we are as private individuals and public citizens by seeing ourselves reflected in images, and we learn who we can become by transporting ourselves into images” (2008: 1). In addition, Maria Elizabeth Grabe and Erik Page Bucy write that “images have an analogical quality that imbues them with direct resemblance to their physical referents” (2009: 6). Therefore, “pictures [...] are more imperative than writing” because “they impose meaning at one stroke without analyzing or diluting” (Barthes, 1991: 108). In *Appeals in Modern Rhetoric*, M. Jimmie Killingsworth also discusses the “appeals to the body” and how they are used as advertising devices. He writes that “appeals to the body are contextually determined and [...] work in combination with other appeals to suggest complex understandings of values” (2005: 69). In addition, Killingsworth explains that any approach to value begins “with a valuation of the body so that appeals to the body are not merely a useful approach but an essential element in any effective communication” (2005: 69). In the book industry, including a depiction of the human body in a book cover can also be an effective advertising strategy. Lauren Linn, art director at Simon & Schuster, argues that young readers in particular value the physical depiction of a central character, as they “receive an impression from the main character from the cover” (cited in Burnett, 2012). As a result, including a human representation on a book cover seems to be much more appealing to the reader, as they attempt to establish a personal relationship with the character, encouraging them to buy the book.

However, not everyone shares this view on the use of the human form on book covers. For instance, author and bookshop co-owner Elizabeth Bluemle argues that a book

cover with “‘in-your-face’ close-ups can turn away readers by taking them out of the story” (cited in Burnett, 2012). In “The Sticky Embrace of Beauty”, Anne Frances Wysocki explains that while looking through a copy of the *New Yorker*, she came across an advert that displayed a photograph of a half-naked woman as the ad’s central feature, which she thought was “a lovely piece of work”, but it also angered her (151). Wysocki writes that post-modern approaches to visual composition, graphic design and visual communication assume a separation of form from content, and by doing so they “emphasize form in such a way that ‘content’ can be unremarkably disembodied — a very bad thing when the ‘content’ is a particular body” (151). Kathleen O’Connell claims that “pushing the idea that the human body is an image to be manipulated and deconstructed in order to fit a culturally ideal form fosters a self-destructive tradition of treating human bodies as objects, not people” (2010: 48). As a result, “using the human body as an advertising tool can potentially have a destructive influence on how young people view their bodies” (O’Connell, 2010: 48). In fact, the human body depictions that we see in adverts and book covers are often of good-looking people, with good skin and thin bodies, which promote an ideal of beauty that young people in particular might become obsessed with.

In the late twentieth century, the fragmented body started to become a prevalent theme in various forms of art. Curator Helaine Posner argues that this preponderance of body fragmentation serves as “a highly charged metaphor for psychological, social, political, and physical assaults on the individual”, emphasizing “the vulnerability of our bodies” and implying “physical violence, sexual oppression, and ultimate loss” (cited in Owens, 2005: 11). Posner claims that we lost our “ideals of beauty and wholeness” at the turn of the last century when the advances in the fields of natural sciences, psychology, sociology and politics began to “reshape the human psyche” (cited in Owens, 2005: 12). Since the 1990s, fragmented depictions of the human body have become recurring motifs on book covers as well. The technological advances of the postmodern era provided “a fluidity of interpretation” which made it possible for designers to explore the relationship between fragments of content more openly (Max Bruinsma, quoted in Drew and Sternberger, 2005: 138). However, this idea of fragmentation may have deeper roots than those established by art and design, which can potentially be explained by literature and psychology.

Two of the most constant themes in emblematic Modernist Fernando Pessoa’s poetry are the “fragmentação do eu” and the “fingimento poético”, which are derived from his acute identity crisis. For instance, in his poem “Chuva Oblíqua” (1916), Pessoa-himself presents a

fragmented being, someone who is not really aware of who they are, and he keeps mixing these fragments with reality and the real with the unreal. In his signature poem “Autopsicografia” (1932), Pessoa explores different levels of pain: one that was felt by his “writer-self”, but that ceased to be real the moment it was translated into words; and one that readers might feel when they read the poem, but which is not going to be either the pain gestured to in the poem, or the pain felt by the author; rather, it is going to be an “interpretative” pain, constructed according to the reader’s experiences, given that we know that readers do not experience the same feelings from the texts they read.

Sigmund Freud believed that adolescence is a period of great inner stress and turmoil, which results from a struggle between the id and the ego. Freud defined the id as the “dark, inaccessible part of our personality” (1965: 91) and its only purpose is to seek pleasure, therefore serving the “pleasure principle” (Sharf, 2012: 34). The ego is not only “a specially differentiated part of”, but also “the representative of the external world to the id” (Freud, 1962: 28). It is the only region of the human mind that is in contact with reality, thus being ruled by the “reality principle”, and its function is “to test reality, to plan to think logically, and to develop plans for satisfying needs” (Sharf, 2012: 35). In other words, the ego is “the executive of the personality” that works to “satisfy the needs of the id” (Hergenhahn and Henley, 2014: 506). It is during pre-adolescence that the child develops a balance between the ego and the id, but when they enter adolescence this balance is disrupted, as the now teenager is bombarded with more socially destabilizing instinctual impulses. According to Freud, the id exists from birth and it allows the baby to get their basic needs met (for instance, if babies are hungry, they will cry for food). Within the first three years of their existence, children develop the ego, as they start to create some kind of personality and take notice of the world around them, which makes the ego become differentiated from the id. At around five or six years old, children are confronted with more imposing instinctual impulses, including those connected with sexuality, as they start to understand the differences between males and females. Because the ego cannot fulfill these sexual drives, the child is likely to become upset and frustrated. When the child enters the pre-adolescence stage, they are able to develop a balance between the ego and the id, as their sexual urges become dormant and they tend to focus their attention on school, friends and hobbies. However, when they enter adolescence this balance is again disrupted, as the now teenager is bombarded with more socially destabilizing instinctual impulses and they experience a reawakening of their sexual urges. When a conflict between the id and ego ensues, anxiety is likely to be experienced. To cope with this anxiety,

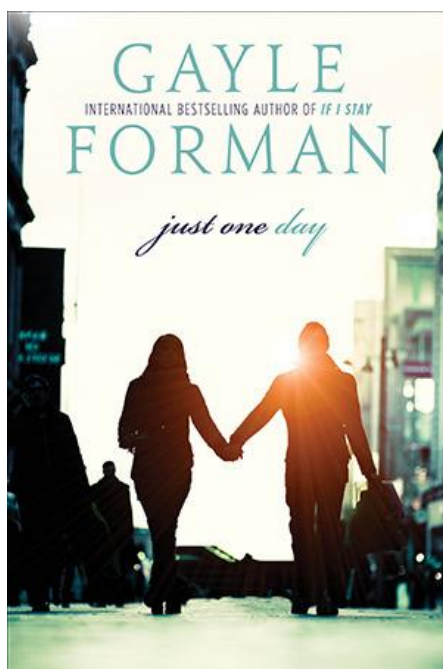


the ego employs several defense mechanisms, which Freud believed to have two things in common: “they distort reality, and they operate on the unconscious level — that is, a person is unaware of the fact that he or she is using one” (Hergenhahn and Henley, 2014: 506). One of these mechanisms is “projection” and it consists of “attributing one’s own unacceptable feelings or thoughts to others” (Sharf, 2012: 36). Another ego defense mechanism is “identification”, which can be described as the process of borrowing someone else’s success to reduce that anxiety and negative feelings (Hergenhahn and Henley, 2014: 506). As a result, “if someone dresses, behaves, or talks the way a person considered successful does, some of that person’s success becomes one’s own” (Hergenhahn and Henley, 2014: 506).

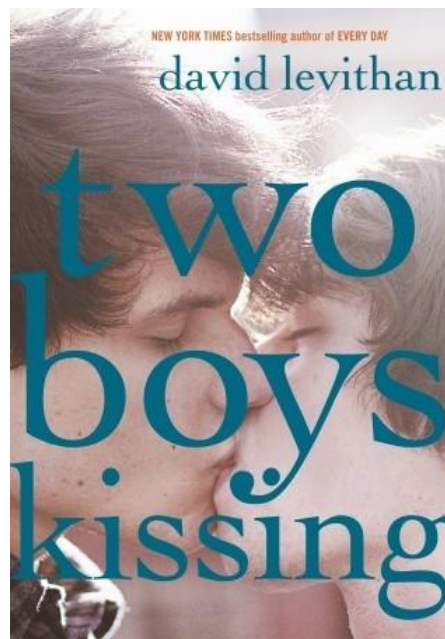
The way we see and interpret things is naturally highly influenced by our knowledge of the world around us and by what we believe. Therefore, if we apply Pessoa’s ideas of the “fragmentation of self” and “poetical pretending” and Freud’s theories of adolescent development and behaviour to the depiction of fragmented bodies on the covers of young adult novels, it could mean that teenagers will in fact create a personal relationship with the character, by means of projection and identification, but that relationship will vary accordingly to the reader’s personal experiences and the depiction will mean different things to different readers.

In my visual analysis of book covers, I concluded that 41 out of 50 covers included a picture of the human body, either in full or fragmented form. The use of photographic representations of people on teen book covers is a practice that started in the late 1960s, when the original cover of S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967) featured the faces of four boys supposedly depicting the four main characters of the story. This practice developed in the 1970s and 1980s, as publishers felt that “personal identification with the characters in the books was [...] vital for teenagers” (Kies, 1995: 90), and it has been a recurring theme on teen book covers since then. It is also interesting to notice that out of the 33 pictures where we can see the gender of the person depicted, 23 are pictures of girls. Cosette Kies writes that since girls tend to buy more books than boys, “the cover art should include, or feature, a girl” (1995: 90). Farrin Jacobs, executive editor of HarperCollins Children’s Books, and Josh Bank, president, East Coast, of Alloy Entertainment, also agree that “the right teen girl in the right pose can [...] move a lot of books” (cited in Rosen, 2010). However, the use of a picture of a girl on a book cover can simply mean that the main character of the story is a girl. Including a boy and a girl on a book cover can also be considered a good marketing strategy, as girls tend to prefer romance novels (Kies 1995: 90). However, out of the 50 book covers analyzed, only

one depicts a heterosexual couple: Gayle Forman's *Just One Day*. The novel tells the story of Allyson Healey, who is on a three-week post-graduation European trip. On her last day in Europe, she meets a free-spirited, wandering actor who asks her to go to Paris with him, to which Allyson says yes. The cover of *Just One Day* shows the silhouette of a couple holding hands and walking down a street, set against a white background with the sunset shining down on them, suggesting to the reader the atmosphere of romance and adventure of the text written inside. There is another cover that depicts a couple and that is *Two Boys Kissing*, by David Levithan. However, this is a homosexual couple, which could indicate that homosexuality is not taboo anymore and writers are now freer to write about it. Apart from *Two Boys Kissing*, there are only 8 other covers that feature a picture of a boy, which again might be suggestive of the fact that boys buy fewer books than girls or simply of the fact that the main character of those books is a boy.



**Figure 9:** Penguin's cover of Gayle Forman's *Just One Day*.



**Figure 10:** Random House’s cover of David Levithan’s *Two Boys Kissing*.

### III.2.3. Colour in young adult book covers

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, colour is “a phenomenon of light or visual perception that enables one to differentiate otherwise identical objects”.<sup>8</sup> Although the word “colour” has been used in English since the fourteenth century,<sup>9</sup> colour vision and perception began “long before our vertebrate ancestors left the oceans some 370 million years ago” (King, 2005: 1). However, the first mammals that evolved in the early Mesozoic Era<sup>10</sup> are thought to have been a largely nocturnal species, which means that much of their ability to see in full colour was lost during this period (King, 2005: 7). Fortunately, the primates that began to emerge following the extinction of dinosaurs and the dawn of the Cenozoic Era were able to re-develop the full colour vision that had been lost by their ancestors millions of years before, allowing our species to evolve “within a very dynamic world of color” (King, 2005: 7, 3). Colour expert Leatrice Eiseman reasons that “without color, life would be very bleak” (1998: 16). In fact, if we did not have the ability to see in full colour, our world would be

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/color>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/color>

<sup>10</sup> The Mesozoic Era, best known as the time of the dinosaurs, began 252.2 million years ago, following the conclusion of the Paleozoic Era, and ended 66 million years ago, at the dawn of the Cenozoic Era. (Source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/377010/Mesozoic-Era>).

reduced to the bleakness of achromatic colours (black, white and grey), which would limit our experiences and moods.

In *Color and Psychological Functioning*, Andrew J. Elliot and Markus A. Maier write that “every visual stimulus processed by the human perceptual system contains color information” (2007: 250). This happens because the light reflected, emitted or projected by objects is carried on wavelengths that are caught by our eyes and converted by our brain into the colours that we see (Singh, 2006: 783). Naturally, the way colour is experienced and perceived will vary from person to person, depending on their biological and psychological characteristics and the context they find themselves in. As Elliot and Maier explain, “color meanings and effects are contextual”, which implies that “a given color has different implications for feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in different contexts” (2007: 251). In the article “Colour as a semiotic mode”, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen introduce the concept of “colour grammar”, stating that “the communicative function of colour is not restricted to affect alone. Arguably, colour itself is metafunctional” (2002: 347). Using Michael Halliday’s metafunctional theory (1978), which states that language simultaneously fulfills three functions — ideational, interpersonal and textual<sup>11</sup> —, Kress and van Leeuwen explain that these purposes can also be assigned to colour. In terms of an ideational function, they argue that colour can clearly be used “to denote specific people, places and things as well as classes of people, places and things, and more general ideas”, such as the colours of flags, maps, cars or corporation logos (2002: 347-348). An interpersonal function can also be assigned to colour because “it can be and is used to *do* things to or for each other, e.g. to impress or intimidate through ‘power dressing’, to warn against obstructions and other hazards by painting them orange, or even to subdue people” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2002: 348). Lastly, Kress and van Leeuwen explain that colour can also function at a textual level, for instance, to distinguish chapter headings and page numbers of each chapter in a book or to differentiate headlines in distinct sections in a newspaper or magazine (2002: 349).

We have been assigning meanings to colours for centuries. For instance, in medieval times, black stood for penance, white meant purity and innocence, and red the Pentecostal fire (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2002: 348). In our everyday lives, we also associate certain meanings

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<sup>11</sup> According to Halliday’s theory, language simultaneously fulfills an ideational function, “the function of constructing representations of the world”; an interpersonal function, “the function of enacting (or helping to enact) interactions characterized by specific social purposes and specific social relations”; and a textual function, “the function of marshalling communicative acts into larger wholes, into the communicative events or texts that realize specific social practices, such as conversations, lectures, reports, etc.” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2002: 346).

to certain colours, most of the time without even thinking about it. For instance, in traffic lights, green means “go” and red means “stop”. Timothy King argues that in order to have a better understanding of some of our most fundamental associations with colour, we must first understand “the colors of the natural world that shaped our species”, because “nature has developed a language of color, which is not only employed in communication within a species, but across species” (2005: 3). King explains that nature uses colour for four basic communication purposes: “to attract or repel members of the same species, and to attract or repel members of different species” (2005: 3). This means, for instance, that flowers with colours situated in the spectrum of reds, rich oranges and bright pinks are more likely to be pollinated by birds (King, 2005: 3). Translating this into the human world would mean that we feel more attracted to bright colours than we do to other colours.

The easiest way to convey meanings into colours seems to be by dividing them into warm and cool colours. Warm colours are the ones that are vivid in nature and the ones that “radiate warmth”, such as red, yellow and orange (Kurt and Osueke: 2014: 2; Eiseman, 1998: 9). Cool colours tend to “cool things down” and include the shades of blue, green and purple (Eiseman, 1998: 9). This means that warm colours, especially red, “are more physiologically and psychologically activating than other colors” (Crowley, 1993: 60). According to Timothy Samara, this happens because warm colours have long wavelengths, which require more energy to be processed as they enter the eye and brain (2007: 111). Consequently, this rise in energy level and metabolic rate result in a feeling of arousal, turning warmer shades, such as red and yellow, into more stimulating colours (Samara, 2007: 111). On the other hand, because cool colours, such as blue, green and violet, have shorter wavelengths, far less energy is needed to process them, causing the slowing of our metabolic rate and a soothing and calming effect (Samara, 2007: 111-112). However, studies (e.g. Silver and McCulley, 1988) have shown that in terms of affective or evaluative reactions, “cool colors are consistently preferred over warm colors” (Crowley, 1993: 62). The same studies have also determined that blue is the colour with the strongest evaluative appeal, while red, although the most activating colour, is the least preferred in an evaluative sense (Crowley, 1993: 62).

When we look at certain colours, we tend to experience different emotions, which can change our mood or perception of something (McDonald). In *Color: Messages and Meanings*, Leatrice Eiseman proposes several meanings to a wide range of colours, based on emotional responses. She explains that throughout the years that she has worked as a colour researcher, she has observed that the psychological messages and meanings typically associated with

particular colours apply to numerous areas of design; “what does differ is the application and context of color” (2006: 4). In the table below are listed the meanings and messages Eiseman consistently associates with the eleven basic colour categories.

Colour	Meanings/Messages
Red	Enticing, elegant, passionate, sensual, bold, strong
Pink	Playful, youthful, sensual, theatrical, romantic, sweet
Orange	Fun, happy, energizing, optimistic, communicative
Yellow	Warm, alive, energetic, luminous
Blue	Constant, serene, calming, truthful
Purple	Magical, intriguing, spiritual
Green	Natural, harmonizing, tranquilizing, luxurious
Brown	Earthy, nurturing, traditional, warm
White	Clean, pure, innocent, ethereal, pristine, authentic, neutral
Black	Sophisticated, powerful, mysterious, bold, classic, stylish, modern
Grey	Neutral, classic, sober, timeless, quiet

**Table 5:** Meanings and messages attributed by Leatrice Eiseman to the eleven basic colour families (2006).

In *Design Elements: A Graphic Design Manual*, Timothy Samara also suggests some meanings and associations for the shades of red, yellow, orange, brown, green, blue, violet and grey, asserting that the meaning transmitted by colour, although “profoundly subjective”, can indeed be used to influence content in a very effective manner (2007: 84, 111). The table below comprises the meanings Samara attributes to these colours.

Colour	Meanings
Red	Noticeable, impulsive, stimulating, passion, arousal
Yellow	Sun, warmth, happiness, lively, enticing, wealth
Orange	Vitality, arousal, warmth, friendliness, out-going, adventurous, slightly irresponsible, health, strength, exotic
Brown	Comfort, safety, timelessness, lasting, trustworthy, ecological
Green	Relaxing, safe, youthful, energetic, earthiness, illness, decay
Blue	Calm, protection, safety, solid, dependable
Violet	Compromising, mysterious, elusive, dreamy, magical
Grey	Noncommittal, formal, dignified, authoritative, aloof, precision, control, competence, sophistication, industry

**Table 6:** Meanings attributed by Timothy Samara to the colours red, yellow, orange, brown, green, blue, violet and grey (2007: 111).

There is no doubt that colour is omnipresent and a vital source of information. Satyendra Singh explains that “people make up their minds within 90 seconds of their initial interactions with either people or products [and] about 62-90 percent of the assessment is based on colors alone” (2006: 783). As a result, marketers have been using colour to distinguish brands and products since the dawn of professional promotion. Akcay, Sable and Dalgin argue that marketers are aware that colour not only plays an important role in the creation of brand images, but also influences the consumer’s decision making process and mood (2012: 1). In fact, in the advertising world, colour can even be more effective than words. Leatrice Eiseman claims that “color informs, bringing instant comprehension, calling attention, delivering information, creating an identity and explaining the characteristics of a product (or service)” (2006: 66). Most importantly, “color can not only move people on an emotional level, but it is also a ‘moving element’ that can stimulate an action or reaction, causing people to move in a desired direction” (Eiseman, 2006: 66). Essentially, this means that colour has the ability to affect a consumer’s general perception of a product and to influence their buying decisions by persuading them into purchasing a certain item instead of another.

For teenagers and young people in particular, colour seems to have a great significance in terms of product selection. In Akcay, Sable and Dalgin’s research to determine the importance of colour in product choice among several demographics of the United States, it was concluded that product colour is very important among young adults, regardless of their gender or socio-economic background (2012: 5). In the same study, it was also observed that the importance of colour decreases with age, meaning that older people do not value the colour of the product as much as younger people (Akcay, Sable and Dalgin, 2012: 5). In 2004, Naz Kaya and Helen H. Epps conducted a study to determine the relationship between colour and emotion among university students. They asked 98 subjects to indicate their emotional responses to five principal hues (red, green, yellow, blue and purple), five intermediate hues (yellow-red, green-yellow, blue-green, blue-purple and red-purple) and three achromatic colours (white, gray and black), as well as the reasons for their choices. In general terms, the results revealed that the principal hues had the highest number of positive emotional responses, followed by the intermediate and lastly the achromatic colours. For the principal hues, green was the colour that evoked more positive emotions, followed by yellow, blue, red and purple. For the intermediate hues, blue-green elicited the highest number of positive reactions, followed by red-purple, yellow-red, purple-blue and lastly, green-yellow. For the

achromatic colours, white was the one with the most positive responses, followed by black and then gray. Interestingly enough, green was the only colour that evoked only positive feelings and gray was the only colour that evoked only negative feelings. In the table below are listed the feelings the students associated with all these colours and hues (both the positive and the negative).

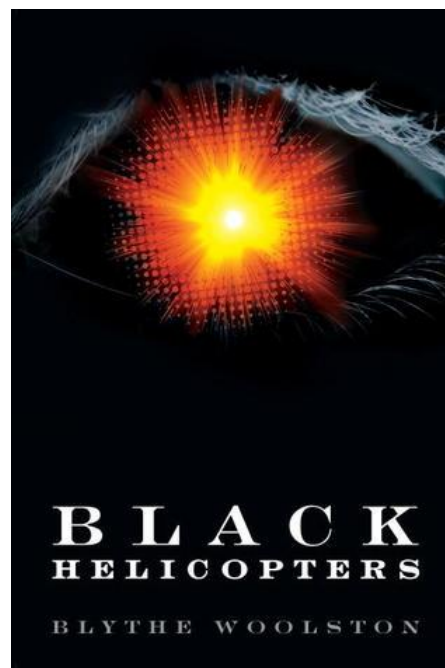
Colour/Hue	Words/Feelings
Green	Relaxation, calmness, happiness, comfort, peace, hope, excitement, nature, trees
Yellow	Happiness, energy, excitement, sun, blooming flowers, summertime
Blue	Relaxation, calmness, happiness, comfort, peace, hope, sadness, depression, loneliness
Red	Love, romance, happiness, excitement, anger, fight, blood, Satan, evil
Purple	Relaxation, calmness, happiness, sadness, tiredness, power, fear, boredom, excitement, comfort, children, laughing
Blue-green	Happiness, calmness, excitement, energetic, comfort, annoyance, confusion, disgust
Red-purple	Happiness, love, calmness, excitement, power, depression, disgust, annoyance, boredom
Yellow-red	Happiness, excitement, energy, comfort, disgust, annoyance, boredom
Purple-blue	Calmness, happiness, peace, hope, sadness, tiredness, loneliness
Green-yellow	Sickness, disgust, annoyance, boredom, confusion, happiness, comfort, excitement
White	Innocence, peace, hope, purity, simple, clean, emptiness, loneliness, boredom
Black	Sadness, depression, fear, anger, richness, power
Grey	Sadness, depression, boredom, confusion, tiredness, loneliness, anger, fear

**Table 7:** Feelings attributed by college students to certain colours and hues in Kaya and Epps' study (2004).

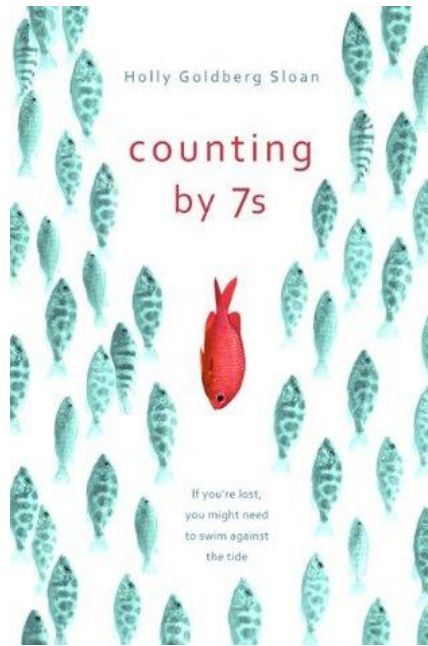
Interestingly enough, in the teen book covers analyzed, black is the most predominant colour, not only as background colour, but also as the colour of other graphic elements, such as people's clothes and hair. Representing the absence of colour, black is often associated with feelings of emptiness, sadness, depression, fear and death. However, it can also represent sophistication, power, mystery, class and modernity. In the second half of the twentieth century, black also became associated with individuality and social rebellion, an idea popularized by such films as *The Wild One* (1953), for instance, where Marlon Brando wears an emblematic black leather jacket, and celebrated by the punk subculture that emerged in the



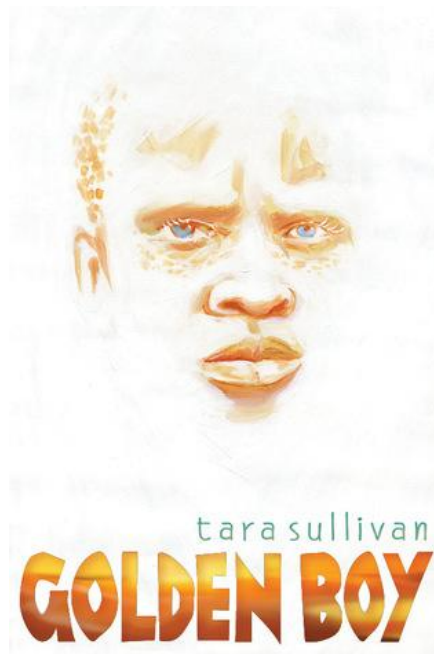
1970s. In terms of book cover design, black makes the book appear sleek, sophisticated and appealing to a wide range of audiences. A black background will also make all the other colours stand out. For instance, a cover like *Black Helicopters*, with an entirely black background and just a graphic element that resembles an eye with a big and bright iris in the shades of yellow, orange and red will stand out immediately in the bookshelf, as “bright colors glow like jewels in dark backgrounds” (Bang, 1991: 92). In addition, as stated by Tom Dyckhoff (2001), black is often used in the mystery, thriller, horror and sci-fi genres, given its associations with mystery and the unknown. In terms of background colours, white is also frequently used. In *Picture This: Perception and Composition*, Molly Bang explains that “white or light backgrounds feel safer to us than dark backgrounds because we can see well during the day and only poorly at night” (1991: 92). This means that a white background will give off an idea of innocence and purity, such as in *Counting by 7s* and *Golden Boy*. However, using white as background colour can also make the design seem cold and barren, as happens in *When We Wake*.



**Figure 11:** Candlewick’s cover of Blythe Woolston’s *Black Helicopters*.



**Figure 12:** Penguin's cover of Holly Goldberg Sloan's *Counting by 7s*.



**Figure 13:** Penguin's cover of Tara Sullivan's *Golden Boy*.



**Figure 14:** Little, Brown's cover of Karen Healey's *When We Wake*.

On these covers, there is a great variety of color combinations, seemingly at random, but more likely used deliberately because of their associations with groups of emotions. For instance, blue is often paired with white, light blue or green, suggesting feelings of comfort or coolness, depending on the reader's interpretation. Several covers feature accents of colour, most commonly in red or other warm colours, such as yellow and orange, which can work as a centre of attention, as well as of a point of happiness and excitement. The achromatic colours also appear frequently in combination, suggesting feelings of sadness, depression, boredom or of innocence, peace and simplicity, turning the cover into an understated work of design. Black and purple are also paired on two covers, suggesting feelings of power, class and wealth, as well as magic and intrigue.

It is also interesting to notice that pink does not appear on any of the book covers analyzed. Associated with romance, sensuality and the feminine, pink is often used on book covers marketed to women, which often deal with themes related to love and feminine issues. The lack of pink on young adult book covers might indicate a shift in teens' reading habits, as they now seem to prefer fantasy, mystery and science-fiction novels, possibly on account of the Harry Potter phenomenon. This could also be an attempt to appeal more to a male teen audience which generally shies away from anything that suggests femininity. Since male teenagers will be more attracted to traditional masculine colours, they might in this way be attracted to a wider variety of books whether the main characters are men or not.

### III.2.3. Typography in young adult book covers

Like colour, typography surrounds us in our everyday lives in the most varied of ways: “it enables, guides and directs us through physical space with signing, timetables, commercial agreements, advertisements, promotion, tokens of value, receipts, banknotes, tickets and stamps and takes us on intellectual journeys through literature and poetry” (Baines and Haslam, 2005: 7). Typography has been widely defined as the art of creating and arranging type to convey a message, but designers Phil Baines and Andrew Haslam propose a more comprehensive definition. They write that typography is “intrinsically visual language” which exists “to document, preserve and replicate word-based knowledge and to place it firmly at the core of modern communication design” (Baines and Haslam, 2005: 10). Robert Bringhurst offers us a similar definition, explaining that typography “is a craft by which the meanings of a text (or its absence of meaning) can be clarified, honored and shared, or knowingly disguised” (1997: 17).

It is hard to imagine human existence prior to oral and written communication, but the truth is that for hundreds of thousands of years neither existed. When our ancestors were able to develop their biological capacity for verbal communication in the prehistoric societies, it became easier for humans to interact with each other, “to communicate feelings, thoughts, concepts, techniques, and procedures” (Clair and Busic-Snyder, 2005: 2). However, as civilization evolved and societies started to perfect their tools and healing arts, develop political organizations, and think about the stars, skies, nature and spiritual ideals, it became necessary to register their knowledge, in order for it to have a more lasting and effective influence on succeeding generations (Clair and Busic-Snyder, 2005: 4-5). The first developed writing systems date back to the Bronze Age, approximately 5000 years ago, when the ancient Chinese, Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations established a way of communicating with each other using a pictographic system to convey messages (Carter, Day and Meggs, 2012: 2). Around 1200 BC, the Phoenicians developed the first alphabet to include letters alone, as they needed an efficient and condensed writing system to record business transactions (Arntson, 2012: 89). A few centuries later, the Greeks took the Phoenician alphabet and created letters to represent both vowels and consonants (Arntson, 2012: 90). Finally, around 700 BC, the Romans created their own alphabet with 23 letters, based on both the Etruscan and Greek languages, which gradually evolved into a form almost identifiable to that used in most Western writing systems today (Arntson, 2012: 90).

Although the roots of typography can be traced back to the first punches and dies that were used to make seals and currency in ancient times, it was only in the fifteenth century that the term “typography” came into full meaning, with the invention of moveable type and the printing press by German blacksmith Johannes Gutenberg (Lupton, 2004: 13). This new technique not only allowed the mass-production of books and documents, but also made the process much easier, quicker and less expensive, since once a text had been printed, the arrangement of types could be dismantled, re-arranged and re-used several times (Harkins, 2010: 12). The rise of industrialization and mass consumption in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created an “explosion of advertising”, a new form of communication that called for new kinds of typography (Lupton, 2004: 21). As a result, a wide variety of typefaces were created and developed to meet the demands of the Industrial Revolution era (Arntson, 2012: 90). With the advance of technology and the development of digital typography, designers are now able to create more dramatic and dynamic designs. Because they no longer have to obey the rigidity of the printing press, “designers can easily incorporate experimental compositional techniques and strategies that push the boundaries of how viewers read, assimilate, navigate, and interact with text” (Rabinowitz, 2006: 281). Consequently, type is becoming more and more an important “vehicle of communication” (Rabinowitz, 2006: 281). However, because sometimes typography can take control over meaning, designers must take one thing into consideration: “in communicating a message, a balance has to be achieved between the visual and the verbal aspect of a design” (Knight and Glaser, 2012). In terms of book covers, for instance, this means that designers must be able to create a kind of typography that is visually appealing to the reader, easy to read and suggestive of the book’s content, and not just one that appeals to their sense of visual design.

Despite all the variety of fonts we have today, it is possible to divide them into different type categories. Although experts disagree on how many type categories there are and even what to name them, the following are the ones that are generally accepted as the main categories of type: old style (or blackletter), modern, slab serif (also known as square serif or Egyptian), sans serif, script and decorative (also called novelty or display). The old style typeface is the oldest of all the typefaces, mimicking the calligraphy of twelfth century European monks, and is recognizable by its “gently blended serifs leading into thick and thin strokes (Arntson, 2012: 91; *Meet Your Type*, 2010: 13). The type category referred to as modern has been evolving since the eighteenth century and is characterized by Ellen Lupton as being “radically abstract”, with “thin, straight serifs, vertical axis, and sharp contrast from thick to

thin strokes” (2004: 42). Slab serif typefaces date to shortly after the Industrial Revolution, when the advertising industry began to expand, and are characterized by heavy, square serifs and very little contrast between thick and thin strokes (Cousins, 2012; Graham, 2005: 220; Lupton, 2004: 42). The original sans serif typefaces were created in the early 1800s as “a visual response to the Industrial Revolution”, and came into full development in the 1920s (Graham, 2005: 221). This is a typeface characterized by its lack of serifs and its uniformity in stroke widths (Graham, 2005: 221; Cousins, 2012). Script typefaces evolved from cursive styles and imitate casual handwriting and calligraphy (Patel, 2014; *Meet Your Type*, 2010: 13). Lastly, the decorative category includes the “oddball, super-designed typefaces”, which are often experimental and ornamental and have limited applications (Cousins, 2012; Arntson, 2012: 97). Although decorative type is the one most commonly used on book covers, all the others can also be used to articulate striking effects by manipulating type size or the relation of the type to the images.

As with colours, we can also attribute meanings to certain typefaces. According to Frank Serafini and Susan Clausen, it was Ruari McLean, in *The Thames and Hudson Manual of Typography*, first published in 1980, who first proposed the possibility that “a particular typeface or font may help to express a feeling or mood in addition to the meaning inherent in the sign vehicle itself” (2012). In the article “Towards a Semiotic of Typography”, Theo van Leeuwen also expresses the idea that typography can “enact interactions and express attitudes to what is being represented”, by making texts or parts of text appear “modern, or traditional, capricious or serious, exciting or dull and so on” (2006: 143). Timothy Samara argues that typography’s power to evoke and trigger emotions has to do with their association with cultural motifs and their use in advertising or other pop-culture settings for “specific kinds of subject matter” (2007: 129). This is concurrent with Hassett and Curwood’s claim that “it is only possible to assign meaning to a particular font because of the social genres and conventions in use in a given discourse and time” (2009: 272). For instance, gothic blackletters or texture faces are associated with horror or fantasy because “they are tied to certain historical time periods and because they have been used widely in posters and advertising for movies and books of this genre” (Samara, 2007: 129). In the following table are listed the feelings and emotions that have been widely associated with the main categories of typefaces.

Type category	Feelings/Emotions
Old style	Wisdom, antiquity, traditional
Modern	Strong, progressive, stylish, chic, exclusivity, fashionable, sharp, intelligent
Slab serif	Bold, strong, modern, solid, funky, fun
Sans serif	Stability, objective, clean, modern, universal
Script	Elegance, affectionate, creativity, feminine, intriguing, wealth, friendly, familiarity, casual, sophistication
Decorative	Friendly, unique, expressive, amusing, pleasing, bold, edgy, alternative

**Table 8:** Feelings and emotions often attributed to the main typeface categories (Shaikh, Chaparro and Fox, 2006; Matthews, 2011; *The Psychology of Fonts and Typefaces*, 2014; Mahood, 2006: 109).

Timothy Samara writes that book covers often require a kind of treatment similar to that applied to posters, so that the cover is able to “attract readers in a crowded sales environment and communicate the book’s content in a visceral way” (2004: 123). That is why designers often chose to use decorative or display typography in book covers. Display typography is any kind of typeface that catches the eye and that makes the viewer feel “intrigued and cajoled into reading the copy” (Lewis, 2007: 83). In addition, display typography “can add character, inform us, enthrall us, enthuse us and sometimes purposefully confuse us or stop us in our tracks (Harkins, 2010: 76). Considering that teenagers often feel more attracted to unusual and dynamic typefaces (Mahood, 2006: 110), decorative typography would be the best obvious choice for a teen book cover. However, interestingly enough, in the fifty young adult book covers analyzed, the great majority of typefaces belongs to the sans serif category. This option for sans serif typography may be due to the fact that the images and colours seen on these covers are generally strong and imposing. Therefore, the cleanness, simplicity and objectiveness of sans serif typography creates a balance with the images and colours’ striking nature and makes the title of the book stand out on its own. Additionally, sans serif type is used universally, which means that it will be appealing not only to an American audience, but also to a wider variety of readers.

## CONCLUSION

Nowadays we are surrounded by an enormous variety of visual stimuli, from films and TV shows to billboards and magazines, not to mention the immense contemporary realms of videogames and internet websites, all of which work to deliver a successful experience to the user. Jesse James Garrett defines user experience as “the experience the product creates for the people who use it in the real world”, that is to say, “how it works on the outside, where a person comes into contact with it” (2011: 6). In *The Elements of User Experience*, Garrett introduces the concept of “sensory design”, explaining that “every experience we have [...] fundamentally comes to us through our senses”, and highlights vision as the area where designers have the most sophistication since “visual design plays a role in virtually every kind of product there is” (2006: 135-136). Considering that a great part of the information that reaches our brain comes through visual stimuli, designers must learn the needs and wants of the audience they are developing products for, in order to create a product that is visually appealing and engaging, which will ultimately provide an effective and positive experience to the user.

In the book industry, the cover is probably the most important aspect in the design of a book. The reason for this is that a book cover must be able to “to communicate the book’s content and convey information concerning both what the book is *about* and what the book is *like*” (Barthelmess, 2014). In fact, the imagery and style displayed on a cover can be suggestive not only of the book’s characters, setting and plot, but also of the tone, mood and narrative quality of the content written inside. Evolving from a mere protection device to a powerful marketing tool, book covers are now the “selling point” that will make a reader buy one book instead of another. Paul Buckley, the Vice President Executive Creative Director at Penguin Group USA, claims that “the cover may very well be the single biggest piece of marketing that book[s] will receive” (quoted in Kleinman, 2012). As a result, book covers have been manipulated by publishing companies as a way to attract and hold readers, both teenagers and adults. A 1998 survey led by *Publishers Weekly* and BookExpo America to determine teens’ reading habits concluded that 57% of the teenagers polled agreed that book covers are the element that most influences their choice when they buy a book (Yampbell, 2005: 354). Similarly, in 2005, Leigh Ann Jones (2007: 45) conducted an online questionnaire to determine the impact of book covers for middle school students and found that 76% of the teens surveyed agreed that the cover was indeed the greatest influence in their selection of books.



And in fact, teen book covers in particular have become more sophisticated and bold in terms of design, which suggests designers' concern in creating a product that is both visually appealing to teenage readers and visually strong enough to compete with all the other entertainment industries.

In this dissertation, I proposed to carry out a visual analysis of 50 teen book covers, which were drawn from YALSA's 2014 Best Fiction for Young Adults list, in order to determine trends and common patterns in terms images, colours and typography used. In terms of images, I concluded that the human body is most prevalent motif in teen book covers. In addition, the fragmented body appears more often than the full body, with the focus on the upper part of the body (face and eyes). Including an image of the human body on a teen book cover is an efficient marketing strategy, as readers will receive an immediate impression of the main character and are thus more likely to establish an initial personal relationship with them by means of projection and identification. In terms of colours, it was hard to establish a particular trend, since colours seemed to be used at random. However, it was possible to determine that black is the most predominant colour on teen book covers. Using black on a cover makes the book appear sleek and sophisticated and this relates to the kind of book teens are reading nowadays: mystery, horror, fantasy, science-fiction and thrillers. Considering that red is the most psychologically and physiologically activating colour, it was interesting to notice that the teen book covers analyzed are largely achromatic and warm colours, such as red and yellow, only appear as accents, functioning as centres of localized attention on covers. Lastly, in terms of typography, it was also very interesting to notice that sans serif type is the most prevalent typographic style. This is interesting because decorative typography is usually the kind of typography used on book covers, so the use of sans serif type might be an attempt to create a balance between its cleanness and simplicity and the bold nature of the covers' images and colours.

In general terms, at the end of this dissertation, I arrived to the following conclusion: the young adult book cover nowadays consists of a picture of the human body, mostly a girl, and fragmented with the focus on the upper part of the body, such as the face and the eyes, all in achromatic colours with accents of warm colours, especially red, and with the title written in sans serif type. To me, this suggests an attempt on the part of publishing companies to create book covers as visually strong as all the images provided by the other entertainment industries, such as films and videogames, for instance, which usually claim more teenage attention than books, so as to be able to compete with them. In addition, our culture is very body-driven and

teenagers in particular are very conscious about their bodies and the way they look. Therefore, including a picture of a body or part of a body (“body appeals”, as Killingsworth calls it) on a book cover is an attempt at a marketing strategy designed to activate readerly identification in some way with the book’s protagonists, or with the sense of style evoked by the cover’s design elements. Whether it will be successful or not cannot, of course, be guaranteed, which leaves cover designers ceaselessly looking for the right formula. And this ensures that the liveliness and creativity of the book cover industry will continue for the foreseeable future, making it a very exciting and promising field for artists to continue working on.

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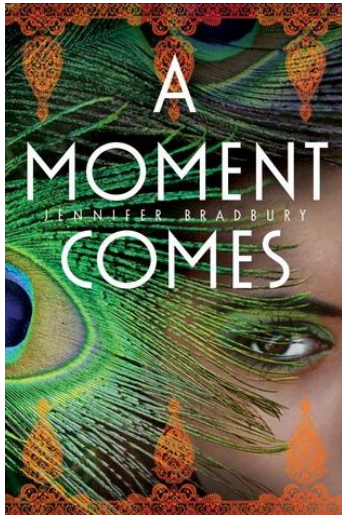
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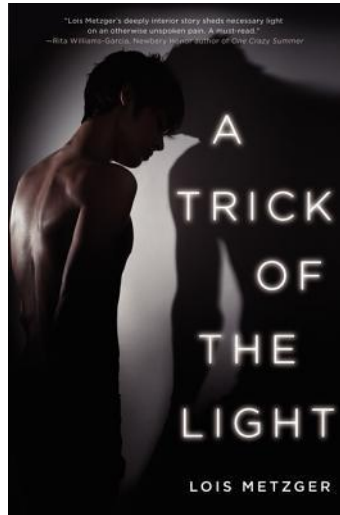
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## ANNEX

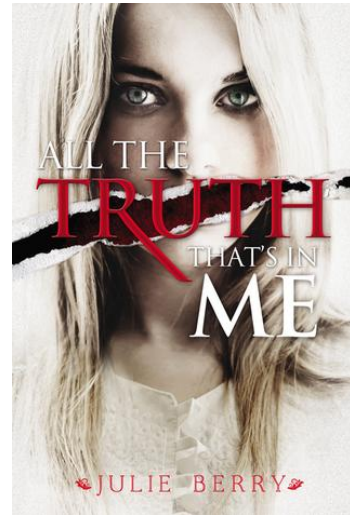
### The 50 book covers analyzed in this thesis



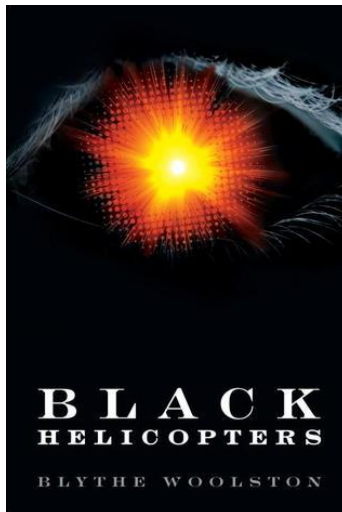
Random House's cover of Jennifer Bradbury's *A Moment Comes*.



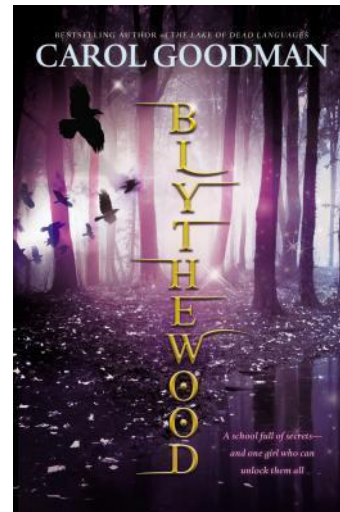
HarperCollins's cover of Lois Metzger's *A Trick of the Light*.



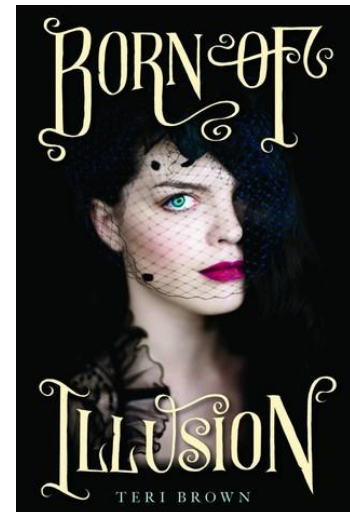
Penguin's cover of Julie Berry's *All The Truth That's In Me*.



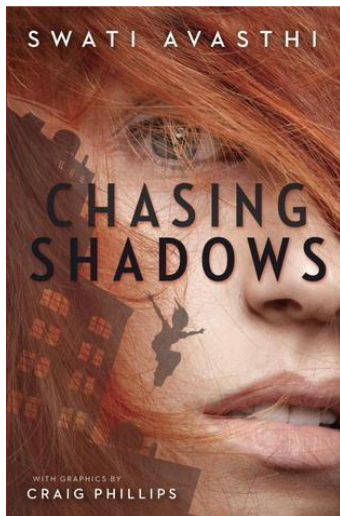
Candlewick's cover of Blythe Woolston *Black Helicopters*.



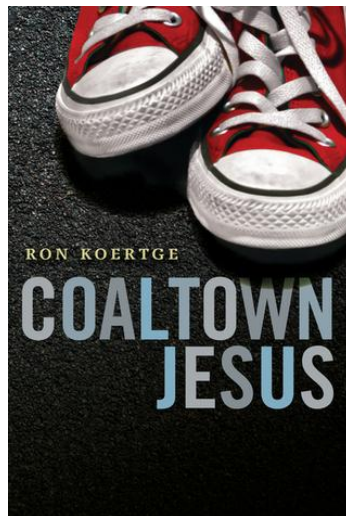
Penguin's cover of Carol Goodman's *Blythewood*.



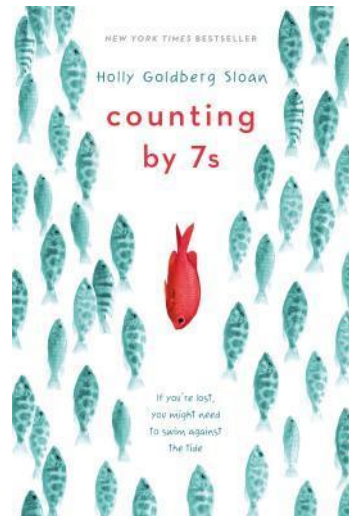
HarperCollins's cover of Teri Brown's *Born of Illusion*.



Random House's cover of Swati Avasthi's *Chasing Shadows*.



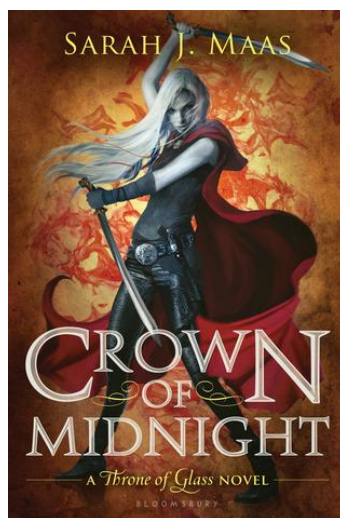
Candlewick's cover of Ron Koertge's *Coaltown Jesus*.



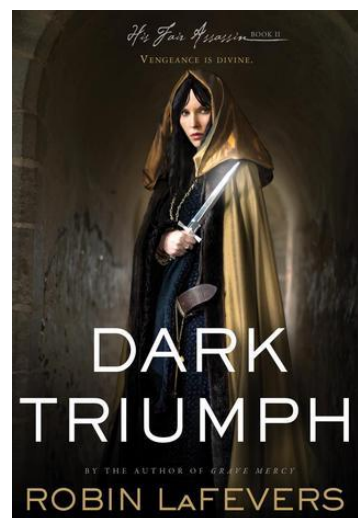
Penguin's cover of Holly Goldberg Sloan's *Counting By 7s*.



HarperCollins's cover of Michael Hassan's *Crash and Burn*.

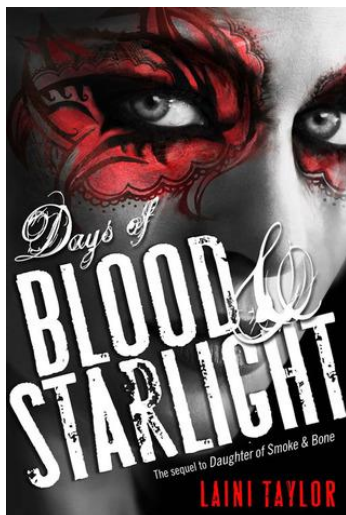


Bloomsbury USA's cover of Sarah J. Maas's *Crown of Midnight*.

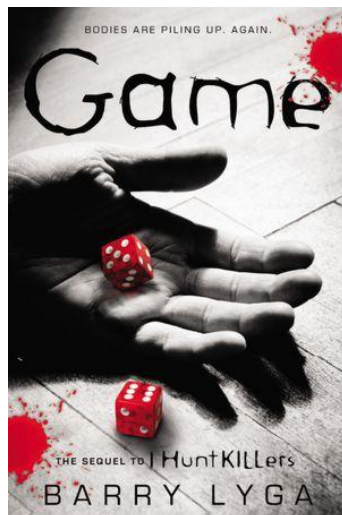


Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's cover of Robin LaFevers's *Dark Triumph*.

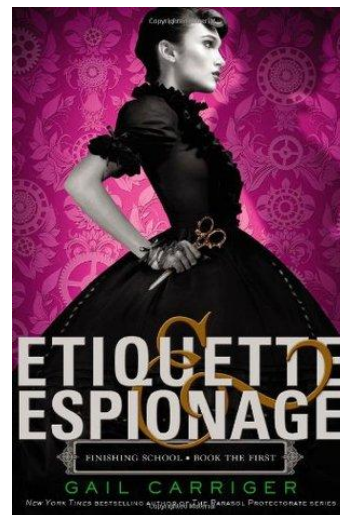




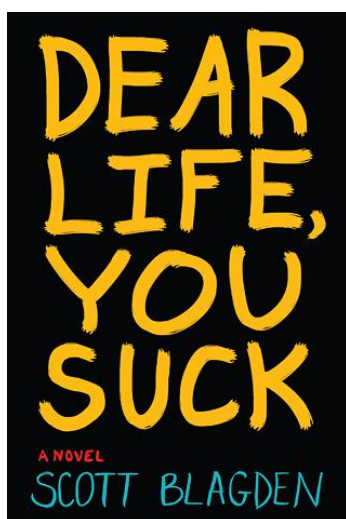
Little, Brown's cover of Laini Taylor's *Days of Blood and Starlight*.



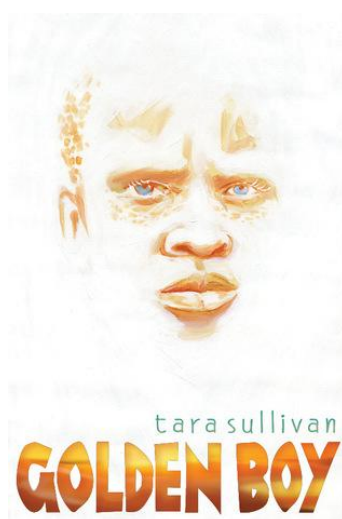
Little, Brown's cover of Barry Lyga's *Game*.



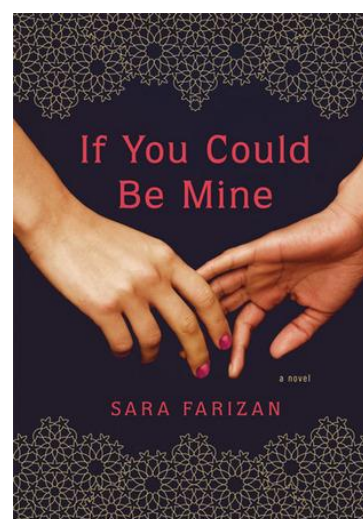
Little, Brown's cover of Gail Carriger's *Etiquette & Espionage*.



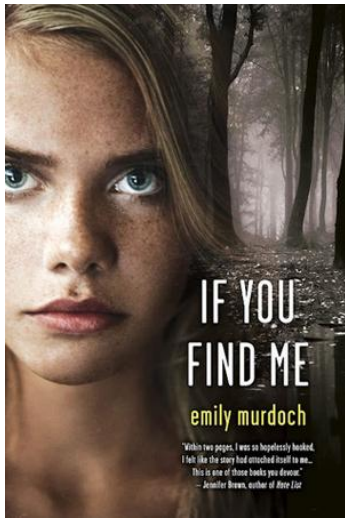
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's cover of Scott Blagden's *Dear Life, You Suck*.



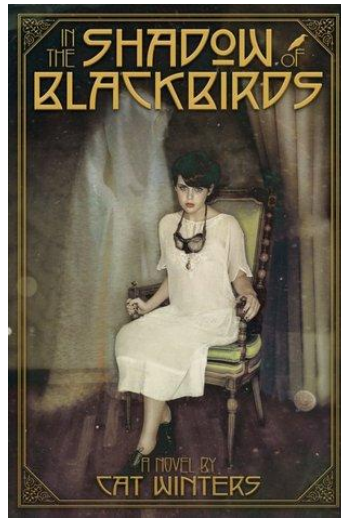
Penguin's cover of Tara Sullivan's *Golden Boy*.



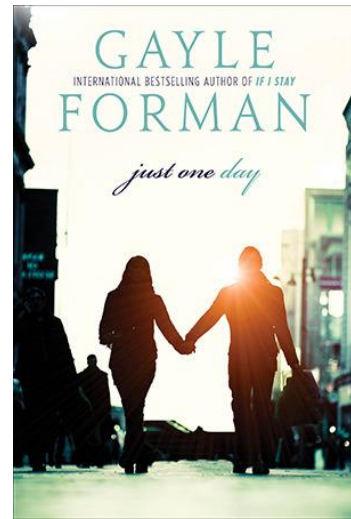
Algonquin's cover of Sara Farizan's *If You Could Be Mine*.



Macmillan's cover of Emily Murdoch's *If You Find Me*.



Abrams's cover of Cat Winters' *In the Shadows of Blackbirds*.



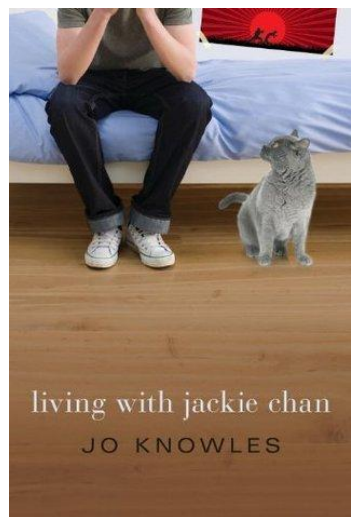
Penguin's cover of Gayle Forman's *Just One Day*.



Little, Brown's cover of Annabel Pitcher's *Ketchup Clouds*.

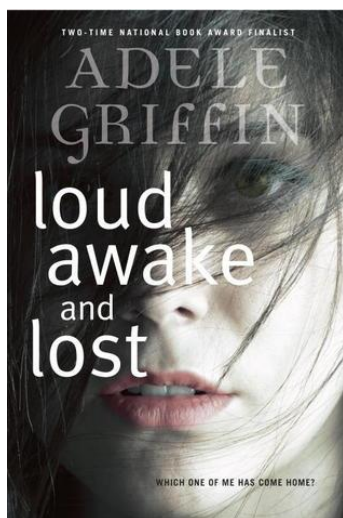


Random House's cover of Shawn Goodman's *Kindness For Weakness*.



Candlewick's cover of Jo Knowles' *Living With Jackie Chan*.

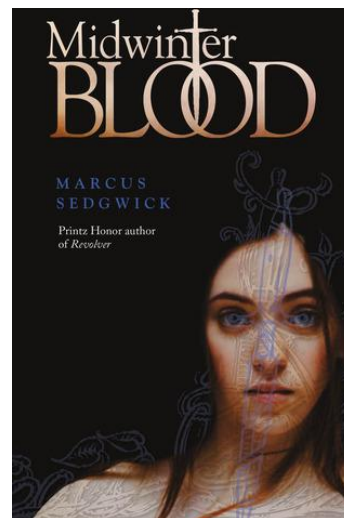




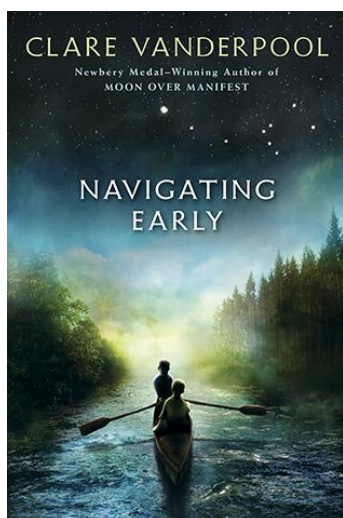
Random House's cover of Adele Griffin's *Loud Awake and Lost*.



Random House's cover of Laura Buzo's *Love and Other Perishable Items*.



Macmillan's cover of Marcus Sedgwick's *Midwinterblood*.



Random House's cover of Clare Vanderpool's *Navigating Early*.

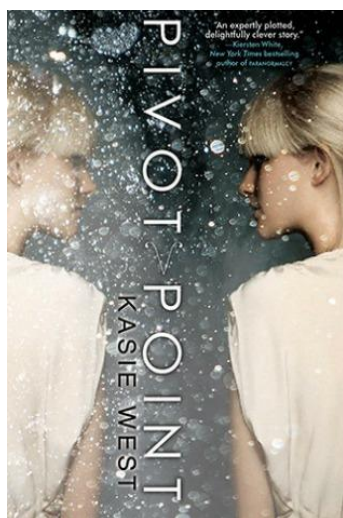


Simon & Schuster's cover of Lauren DeStefano's *Perfect Ruin*.

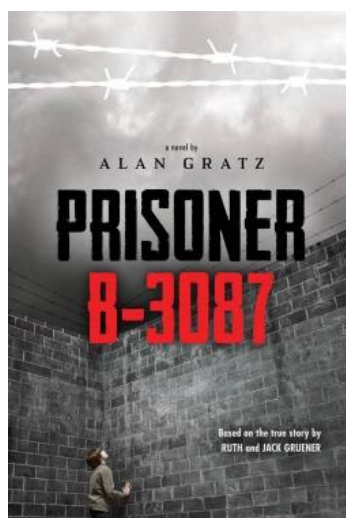


Simon & Schuster's cover of Chris Lynch's *Pieces*.





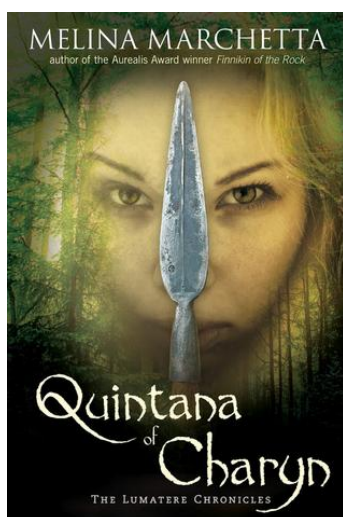
HarperCollins's cover of Kasie West *Pivot Point*.



Scholastic's cover of Alan Gratz's *Prisoner B-3087*.



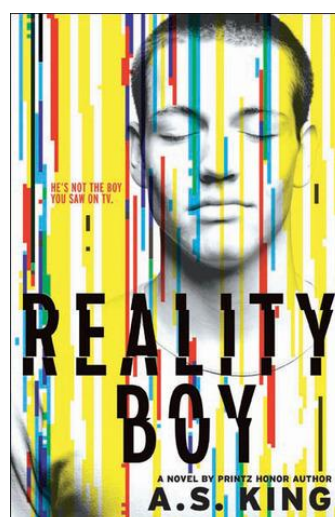
Penguin's cover of Marie Lu's *Prodigy*.



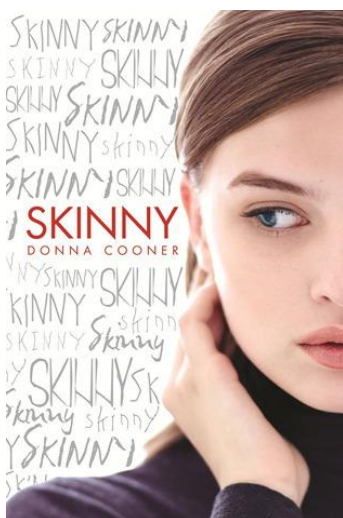
Candlewick's cover of Melina Marchetta's *Quintana of Charyn*.



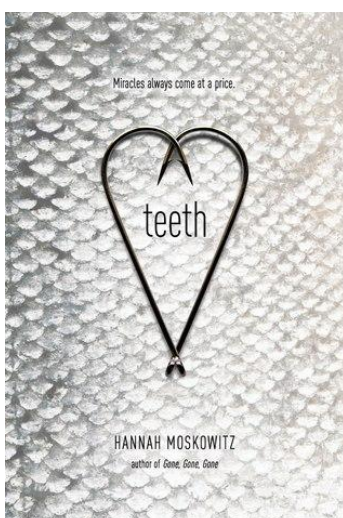
Random House's cover of Juliet Marillier's *Raven Flight*.



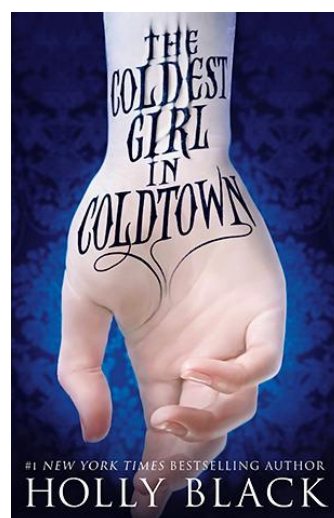
Little, Brown's cover of A. S. King's *Reality Boy*.



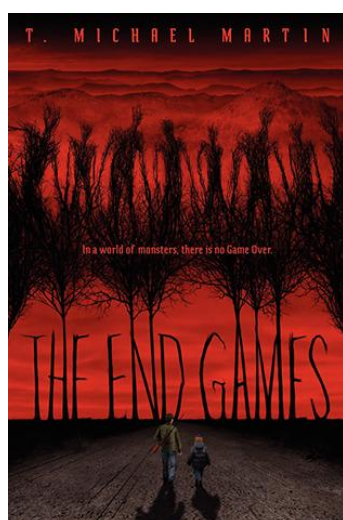
Scholastic's cover of Donna Cooner's *Skinny*.



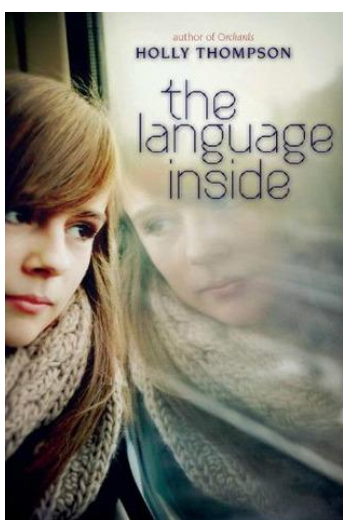
Simon & Schuster's cover of Hannah Moskowitz's *Teeth*.



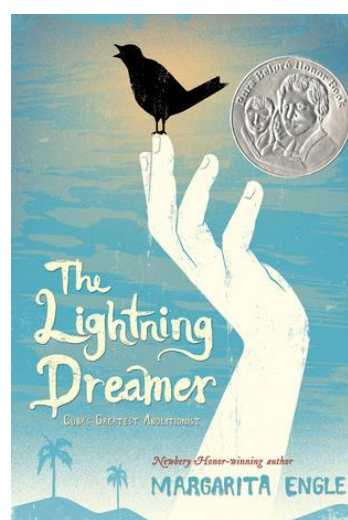
Little, Brown's cover of Holly Black's *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*.



HarperCollins's cover of T. Michael Martin's *The End Games*.

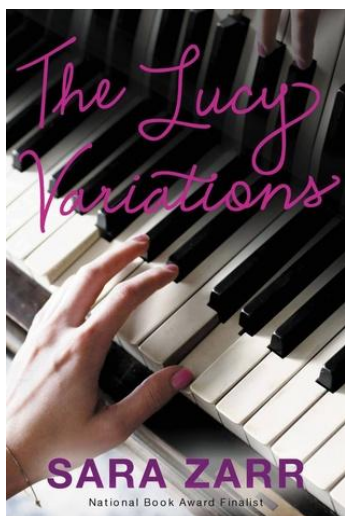


Random House's cover of Holly Thompson's *The Language Inside*.

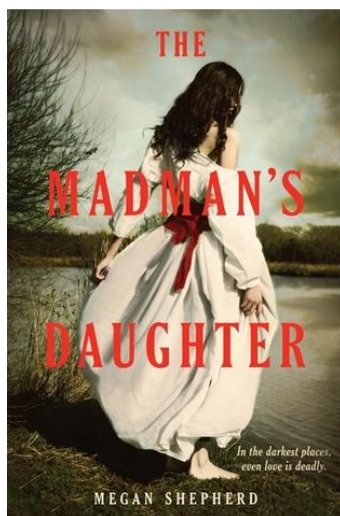


Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's cover of Margarita Engle's *The Lightning Dreamer*.

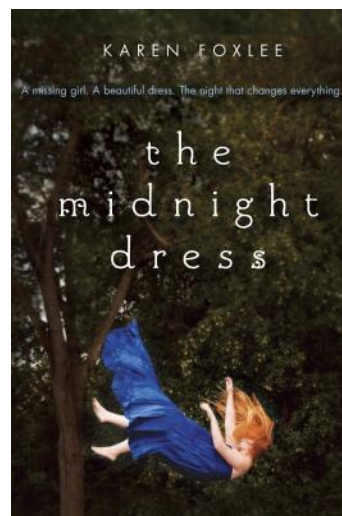




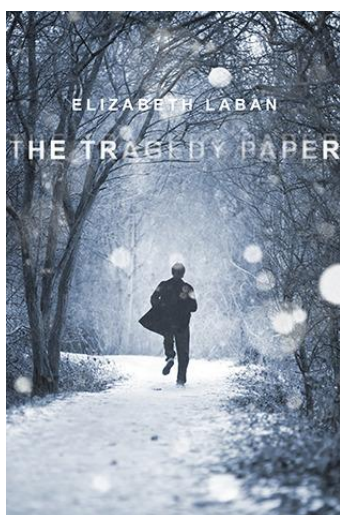
Little, Brown's cover of Sara Zarr's *The Lucy Variations*.



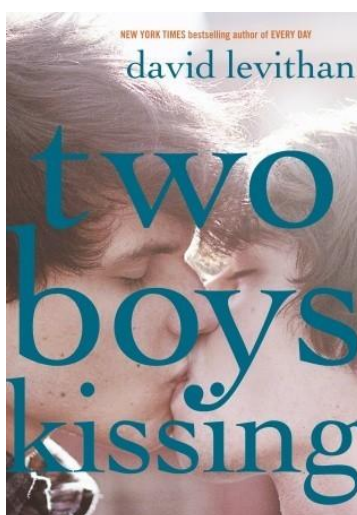
HarperCollin's cover of Megan Shepherd's *The Madman's Daughter*.



Random House's cover of Karen Foxlee's *The Midnight Dress*.



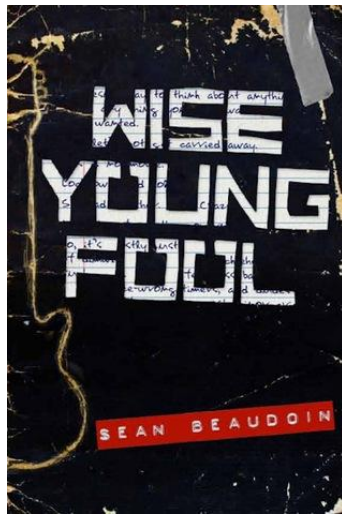
Random House's cover of Elizabeth Laban's *The Tragedy Paper*.



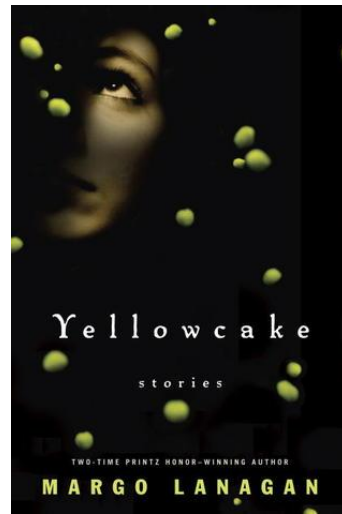
Random House's cover of David Levithan's *Two Boys Kissing*.



Little, Brown's cover of Karen Healey's *When We Wake*.



Little, Brown's cover of Sean Beaudoin *Wise Young Fool*.



Random House's cover of Margo Lanagan's *Yellowcake*.